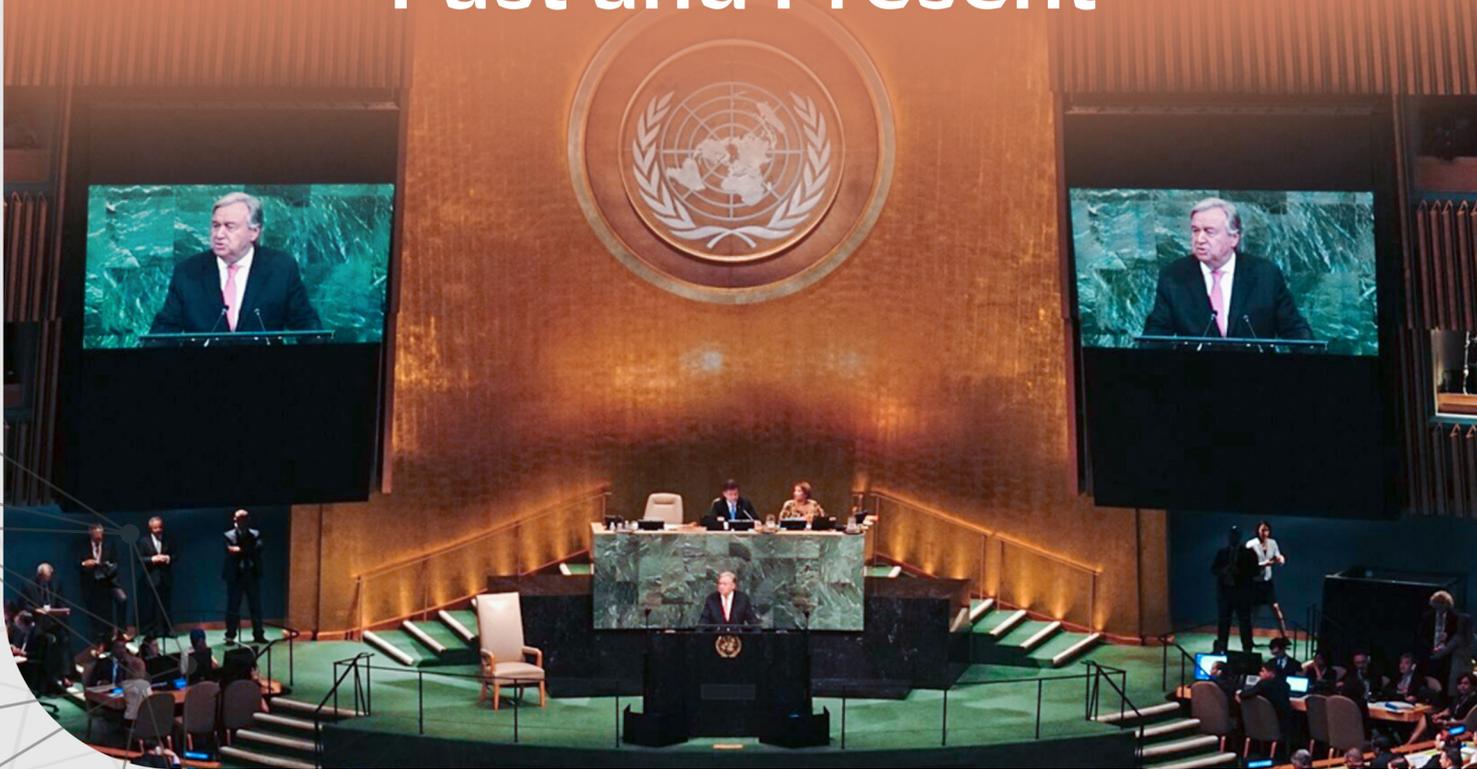


**case study**  
November 2025

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# The United Nations' Position on Yemeni Unity: Past and Present



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# **The United Nations' Position on Yemeni Unity: Past and Present**



Case Study



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We are a research institution concerned with studying Yemeni affairs and the regional and international influences on it. Through interpreting history, analysing the present, and predicting the future, in the aim of positive participating for better future of Yemen

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## Introduction

Yemeni achieved unity between the northern and southern parts on May 22, 1990, resulting in the establishment of a single state that replaced both the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. Following the unification agreement, the new state went through various phases and developments, influenced by multiple internal and external factors. Among these influential factors was the role of the United Nations, which has been present at different stages of Yemen's modern history.

The discussion about the UN's pivotal role in shaping the fate of Yemeni unity has resurfaced recently. Some believe that the "secessionist discourse" has found growing acceptance within the UN, arguing that the Southern Transitional Council (STC) has managed to sway the organization's stance — particularly with its president, Aidarous al-Zubaidi, a member of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) — participating for the third consecutive time in the sessions of the UN General Assembly, alongside the PLC's chairman, Rashad al-Alimi.

Meanwhile, other observers maintain that the UN's position remains supportive of Yemen's unity, considering it one of the fundamental principles that continues to enjoy broad consensus in the organization's approach to the Yemeni issue.

This paper provides an assessment of the United Nations' role toward the Yemeni union since its establishment, tracing relevant developments and reviewing UN Security Council resolutions related to Yemen, in order to present an accurate understanding of how the organization has dealt with the issue of Yemeni unity.

## The UN's Position on Yemeni Unification and the 1994 Secession War

North Yemen — then known as the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen — gained membership in the United Nations through Security Council Resolution No. 29 on September 30, 1947, which unanimously recommended Yemen's admission. The General Assembly later approved this recommendation in accordance with Article 4 of the UN Charter.

As for South Yemen — then known as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen — it was admitted to the UN through Security Council Resolution No. 243 on December 14, 1967, also by unanimous vote. The admission of both states granted them full sovereignty, allowing for the later establishment of a unified state, which was realized on May 22, 1990.

Following unification, the 45th session of the UN General Assembly issued a resolution welcoming the merger of the two Yemeni states and recognizing the Republic of Yemen (Unified Yemen) as a single member state of the United Nations. This effectively merged the legal identities of both former states into one unified legal entity.

The United Nations' handling of Yemeni unification reflected a positive stance, serving as one of the external factors that supported and legitimized the process internationally. The move symbolized a global consensus on recognizing Yemen as one united state.

However, the unity experienced challenges soon after its establishment — beginning with tensions between the central government in Sana'a, led by President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and the ruling bloc in the south, headed by Vice President Ali Salem al-Beidh. These tensions culminated in the 1994 Civil War, when al-Beidh declared the south's secession from the Republic of Yemen and renounced the unification agreement.

In response to this declaration, the United Nations' position was that of firm support of the union through Security Council Resolutions No. 924 and 931, both of which refused to recognize the declaration of a separate southern state. The resolutions called for a ceasefire and the formation of a fact-finding mission. They treated the secession war as an internal Yemeni matter, asserting that recognizing the secession would constitute interference in the sovereignty of a UN member state — a stance shared by the PLC's permanent members.

The United Nations, therefore, did not endorse the dissolution of the unification agreement, despite its relatively recent establishment only four years before. Moreover, the Yemeni government's swift response and containment of the southern rebellion further solidified unity as a cornerstone of international policy toward Yemen — including within the UN's framework. This position has remained evident in the UN's continued refusal to recognize the southern secessionist movement (al-Hirak al-Janoubi), which emerged in 2007.

### **The Post-2011 Period**

The debate over the fate of Yemen's union resurfaced more prominently during the 2011 peaceful youth revolution and throughout the subsequent transitional period, accompanied by a series of United Nations' positions related to Yemeni unity. Statements from representatives of member states at the UN, as well as briefings by UN Security Council officials and presidential statements — dated February 15, 2013; August 2, 2014; and March 22, 2015 — all reaffirmed support for Yemen's unity.

Additionally, a letter dated March 24, 2015, from Yemen's Permanent Representative to the United Nations — submitted as an official message from then-President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi to the president of the Security Council — informed the Council of the Arab Coalition's request to support the legitimate Yemeni government.

All these communications underscored the UN's commitment to Yemen's unity and sovereignty, calling on all parties and member states to refrain from taking any actions that could undermine Yemen's territorial integrity.

These statements and communications demonstrate the UN's explicit and consistent commitment to supporting Yemen's unity, treating it as a fundamental principle in its engagement with the Yemeni file. This commitment has been reflected in every proposed framework for ending the war — none of which have included any mention or endorsement of secession under any circumstances.

The United Nations' position in support of the Yemeni union has remained steadfast despite the protracted nature of the ongoing conflict. In 2025, UN Secretary-General António Guterres sent a congratulatory message to Yemen on the occasion of its National Unity Day.

A few days later, a Security Council statement welcomed “the continued efforts of the United Nations through all possible channels to secure the safe and immediate release of detainees,” while reaffirming “the Council members' firm commitment to Yemen's unity, sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, and their support for the Yemeni people.”

Just one day after Presidential Leadership Council member Aidarous al-Zubaidi appointed several pro-Southern Transitional Council figures to government positions, the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen released a Security Council press statement reiterating the members' “strong commitment to Yemen's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.”

From the above, it can be understood that the United Nations maintains a firm and consistent position in support of Yemen's unity — a stance that has effectively become one of the “established constants” in international engagement with the Yemeni issue.

This consistency reinforces the constraints facing the Southern Transitional Council in promoting its secessionist agenda and gaining international recognition or support.

### Relevant Security Council Resolutions

The positions and resolutions of the United Nations Security Council related to Yemen have had a significant impact on the Yemeni issue in general – and on Yemeni unity, in particular. The UN Security Council has issued several resolutions that explicitly or implicitly address the question of unity. Among the most notable are Resolutions 2014 (in 2011), 2051 (in 2012), 2140 (in 2014) and 2201 (in 2015).

To assess the Security Council's role regarding Yemeni unity – whether positive or negative – it is essential to review all of its resolutions related to Yemen, since the unification in 1990, and evaluate their effects on the country's national unity. This is summarized in the following table:

<b>Resolution Number (Year)</b>	<b>Content of the Resolution, Regarding Yemen</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<b>924</b> (1994)	Called for an immediate ceasefire during the 1994 summer war, prohibited the supply of weapons to the warring parties and established a fact-finding committee.	Considered the secession war an internal Yemeni matter
<b>931</b> (1994)	Reaffirmed Resolution 924, urged a ceasefire, and called for dialogue between the parties.	
<b>2014</b> (2011)	Called for implementing the political solution based on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative and a ceasefire.	Supportive of Yemeni unity

Resolution Number (Year)	Content of the Resolution, Regarding Yemen	Evaluation
2051 (2012)	Reaffirmed implementation of the GCC Initiative, its executive mechanism, and Resolution 2014; emphasized Yemen's unity sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity; supported President Hadi; called for a National Dialogue Conference; and warned of possible sanctions.	Explicit support for Yemeni unity
2140 (2014)	Reaffirmed Resolutions 2014 and 2051, the GCC Initiative and its mechanism, and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference; expressed a strong commitment to Yemen's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; and supported the transition from a unitary to a federal state.	Explicit support for Yemeni unity.
2201 (2015)	Reaffirmed Resolutions 2014, 2051 and 2140; the GCC Initiative; the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference; and the Peace and National Partnership Agreement and its security annex; reaffirmed a strong commitment to Yemen's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; and called on the Houthis to release President Hadi, Prime Minister Bahah and cabinet members.	Explicit support for Yemeni unity.
2204 (2015)	Reaffirmed Resolution 2140.	Implicit support for Yemeni unity.

Resolution Number (Year)	Content of the Resolution, Regarding Yemen	Evaluation
2216 (2015)	Reaffirmed a strong commitment to Yemen's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; recognized the legitimacy of President Hadi; reaffirmed previous Security Council resolutions and Hadi's letter to the Council requesting GCC and Arab League support; reaffirmed the GCC Initiative, its implementation mechanism and the National Dialogue Conference outcomes.	Explicit support for Yemeni unity.

By reviewing all the United Nations Security Council-issued resolutions, concerning Yemen from 1994 to the present, and evaluating them, it becomes evident that the Council has consistently supported Yemeni unity and remains one of the strongest factors reinforcing its centrality.

This role played by the United Nations and its Security Council has been highly influential, as it contributes to the international isolation of the secessionist agenda.

The importance of the UN Security Council lies in the fact that the establishment of any breakaway state would be nearly impossible without going through the UN system to obtain international recognition and legitimacy as a fully sovereign state – something that has not occurred in Yemen's case. Consequently, any unilateral declaration of secession would face an uncertain future and could result in prolonged international isolation, similar to the situation of Somaliland. This remains one of the greatest concerns facing the secessionist movement, particularly the Southern Transitional Council.

## The Southern Transitional Council (STC)

Given the United Nations' consistent stance on Yemen's unity, the Southern Transitional Council (STC) has not received recognition from the UN — neither as a de facto authority, nor as a representative of South Yemen, nor as a legitimate party in political negotiations. The Security Council continues to express its support for UN-led efforts to reach a peaceful solution to the Yemeni crisis based on the three agreed-upon references: the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative and its implementation mechanism, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015) — all of which explicitly affirm support for Yemen's unity.

This rejection of the STC's separatist agenda was reiterated in April 2020, when the Council declared “self-administration” in southern Yemen. Both UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths' statement and the Security Council's statement rejected the move, reaffirming Yemen's unity and sovereignty.

The STC has since continued its efforts to sway the UN's position. In May 2023, it convened the Southern Consultative Meeting, which produced what it called the “Southern National Charter.” The event was intended to signal the desire for a separate southern delegation in future negotiations, but the proposal received no response — a position the UN has repeatedly rejected.

The STC's ongoing attempts to gain UN acceptance for its separatist project are evident in Aidarous al-Zubaidi's participation in the UN General Assembly sessions alongside the Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council. His most recent participation marked the third consecutive year — following his attendance in 2023 and 2024 — yet he took part in his capacity as a member of the Presidential Leadership Council of the Republic of Yemen, not as the President of the Southern Transitional Council or a representative of South Yemen.

This clearly indicates that the STC has failed to bring about any shift in the United Nations' position regarding Yemeni unity and that there remains no signs of UN support for secession.

## Conclusion

It appears that continued support for Yemeni unity remains the prevailing position within the United Nations, while the separatist project has gained no acceptance. This stance has a significant impact on the future of Yemen's unity, as the UN's consistent support — along with that of the UN Security Council — constitutes one of the main external pillars upholding the unity of the Yemeni state. This, in turn, provides an important opportunity for the Yemeni government to leverage such international backing in countering secessionist efforts.

However, this supportive position toward Yemeni unity may not remain permanent should international or regional developments emerge that favor fragmentation — particularly if some regional powers continue to support the Southern Transitional Council (STC) in imposing secession by force, coupled with the Presidential Leadership Council's inaction or weakness in confronting such moves.

In light of this, the Presidential Leadership Council must prioritize maintaining the UN's pro-unity stance as a key objective of Yemen's foreign and diplomatic policy — by adopting a firm and consistent discourse that rejects any action undermining the country's national unity.

Furthermore, it is essential to establish an internal approach that ensures stability in southern Yemen and treats the southern issue as an inseparable part of the broader Yemeni question.

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