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Legal Consequences of the Western Coalition's Use of Force Against the Houthis in Yemen

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ABSTRACT

The military intervention of the Western coalition against the Houthis in Yemen represents one of the most legally complex and politically consequential uses of force in contemporary international relations. This article examines the intervention through the normative framework of international law governing the use of force, with particular attention to the prohibition enshrined in the United Nations Charter, the narrow scope of its recognized exceptions, and the evolving challenges posed by non-state armed actors. By integrating doctrinal legal analysis with the factual context of coalition operations, the study evaluates whether the justifications advanced—primarily self-defense and protection of international security—meet the strict legal requirements of necessity, immediacy, and proportionality, and whether the absence of explicit Security Council authorization undermines the legality and legitimacy of the intervention. Beyond legality, the article assesses the broader systemic effects of the Yemen intervention on global peace and international order. It argues that the humanitarian consequences, including large-scale civilian suffering, displacement, and infrastructural collapse, are inseparable from the legal evaluation of the use of force and reveal the limitations of militarized approaches to conflict management. At the international level, the intervention has contributed to the erosion of the collective security system, encouraged unilateralism, and accelerated the normalization of force as a policy instrument, thereby increasing volatility in global security relations. The analysis further demonstrates that these trends risk fragmenting international law by weakening shared norms and compliance incentives. The article concludes that the Yemen case constitutes a critical test for the future of the international legal order. It underscores the necessity of reaffirming the centrality of legal constraints on the use of force, strengthening accountability mechanisms, and reinvigorating multilateral approaches to conflict resolution in order to preserve the credibility of international law and promote sustainable global peace.

Keywords: Use of Force; International Law; Yemen Conflict; Houthis; Western Coalition; Global Peace; UN Charter; Sovereignty; Collective Security; Humanitarian Impact

Introduction

The contemporary crisis in Yemen represents one of the most complex intersections of armed conflict, international law, and global security in the early twenty-first century. Yemen's prolonged instability, rooted in fragile state institutions, socio-economic underdevelopment, and long-standing political fragmentation, deteriorated dramatically after 2011, when the upheavals associated with the Arab Spring weakened central authority and



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intensified internal rivalries. In this fragile context, the Houthi movement, formally known as Ansar Allah, gradually transformed from a localized political-religious group into a dominant armed actor exercising de facto control over large portions of Yemeni territory, including the capital, Sana'a. The rise of the Houthis occurred within a broader regional environment characterized by geopolitical competition and strategic rivalries, particularly between major regional and global powers, which further internationalized Yemen's internal conflict. The erosion of state sovereignty in Yemen created conditions in which external interventions became both politically tempting and legally controversial, especially as the conflict increasingly affected international navigation routes and regional security dynamics, a development that drew sustained attention from international legal scholars and policymakers concerned with the stability of the international system (1). The transformation of the Yemeni conflict from an internal power struggle into a focal point of global strategic concern reflects a broader pattern in modern conflicts, where domestic crises rapidly evolve into international security challenges (2).

As the conflict intensified, a Western-led coalition, most prominently involving the United States and the United Kingdom, undertook military operations directed against Houthi positions, justified primarily on grounds of protecting freedom of navigation, deterring attacks on international shipping, and preserving regional stability. These military actions, including airstrikes and naval operations, have significantly altered the conflict's legal character by introducing new questions regarding the permissibility of using force in circumstances that do not fit neatly within traditional categories of self-defense or collective security. While coalition members have argued that their operations constitute necessary and proportionate responses to threats posed by the Houthis to international commerce and security, international legal doctrine maintains that the use of force remains strictly regulated under the United Nations Charter framework, particularly Article 2(4), which enshrines the general prohibition on the use of force in international relations (3). The increasing reliance on unilateral or coalition-based military action, especially in the absence of explicit Security Council authorization, has raised concerns that foundational principles of the post-World War II international legal order are being gradually weakened (4). The Yemen case therefore provides a critical lens through which to examine the tension between strategic necessity and legal constraint in contemporary international relations.

At the heart of this tension lies the central legal problem that defines the present research: the collision between the prohibition of the use of force and the justifications advanced by the Western coalition. On one side, international law establishes a robust presumption against military force, allowing exceptions only in cases of self-defense against an armed attack or when authorized by the Security Council. This normative structure has long been regarded as the cornerstone of international peace and stability (5). On the other side, coalition states increasingly invoke broader interpretations of self-defense, including protection of international shipping and responses to threats emanating from non-state actors, even when those threats occur within the territory of another sovereign state. Scholars have warned that such expansions of self-defense risk transforming exceptional doctrines into routine practices, thereby hollowing out the prohibition itself (6). In Yemen, the absence of direct armed attacks against coalition territories, combined with the lack of clear Security Council authorization, places the legality of the coalition's actions within a particularly contentious zone of international law (7). This controversy is not merely technical; it goes to the core of whether international law continues to function as a constraint on power or is being reshaped by evolving geopolitical realities (8).

The Yemen conflict also exemplifies a defining feature of modern warfare: the increasing centrality of non-state actors. The Houthis operate outside the traditional framework of statehood yet exert control over territory,

populations, and military capabilities comparable to those of recognized governments. Their actions, including attacks on commercial vessels and military assets, complicate the classical legal distinction between interstate and non-international armed conflict. Contemporary legal scholarship has increasingly recognized that the rise of such actors challenges the conceptual foundations of international humanitarian law and the law governing the use of force (9). The question of whether force may be lawfully used against a non-state actor within the territory of a third state without that state's consent remains one of the most controversial issues in current international legal discourse (10). Yemen thus serves as a paradigmatic case for analyzing how international law adapts—or fails to adapt—to the realities of fragmented sovereignty and hybrid warfare (4).

Beyond its legal complexity, the Yemen crisis has produced catastrophic humanitarian consequences that magnify the urgency of this study. Years of sustained conflict have devastated Yemen's economy, destroyed critical infrastructure, and pushed millions of civilians into extreme poverty, malnutrition, and displacement. International organizations and humanitarian observers consistently describe Yemen as one of the world's gravest humanitarian disasters (11). Civilian casualties resulting from airstrikes, blockades, and the collapse of essential services underscore the human cost of prolonged military intervention (12). Scholars have emphasized that modern conflicts increasingly blur the line between combatant and civilian, placing enormous strain on the international legal mechanisms designed to protect non-combatants (13). The humanitarian suffering in Yemen therefore cannot be treated as an unfortunate side effect of geopolitics; it is a central component of the legal and moral evaluation of the conflict (14).

The continuation of large-scale military operations in Yemen also raises profound concerns regarding the erosion of the international legal order. When powerful states circumvent established collective security mechanisms and rely on unilateral force, the authority of international institutions and the normative framework that underpins global peace is gradually undermined (15). The weakening of multilateralism and the increasing resort to force as a policy tool have broader implications beyond Yemen, contributing to an international environment in which legal restraint is subordinated to strategic calculation (2). Peace theorists have long argued that durable peace depends not merely on the absence of war but on the maintenance of institutionalized legal norms that regulate state behavior (16). The Yemen crisis thus represents not only a humanitarian tragedy but also a structural test of the international system's capacity to manage conflict through law rather than power (17).

Within this context, the present study seeks to address a series of interrelated research questions. The primary question concerns the extent to which the military actions of the Western coalition against the Houthis conform to the principles and rules of international law governing the use of force. Closely connected to this inquiry is the question of whether the justifications advanced by coalition states—principally self-defense and protection of international security—meet the strict legal conditions established under international law. Additional questions explore the long-term consequences of these actions for regional stability and global peace, and whether such practices contribute to the normalization of unilateral military intervention. Based on these questions, the study advances hypotheses that the coalition's actions face serious legal deficiencies, that such interventions risk exacerbating regional instability, and that the erosion of legal constraints on force may undermine the prospects for sustainable global peace.

The methodological approach adopted in this research is primarily doctrinal and analytical, drawing upon the authoritative sources of international law, including treaties, customary norms, judicial decisions, and the writings of leading scholars. The study also incorporates interdisciplinary perspectives from political science and peace

studies to contextualize legal analysis within broader geopolitical and humanitarian realities. Secondary sources, including academic literature, official statements, and reports from international organizations, provide empirical grounding for the legal assessment. Particular attention is given to humanitarian reports and conflict analyses that illuminate the real-world consequences of legal doctrines in practice. This combination of legal interpretation and contextual evaluation allows for a comprehensive examination of how the Yemen conflict reflects evolving patterns in international law and global governance.

Ultimately, the Yemen crisis encapsulates the defining challenges of contemporary international law: balancing sovereignty and security, law and power, humanitarian necessity and political strategy. By situating the Western coalition's actions within the broader transformation of global conflict, this study aims to clarify the legal boundaries of permissible force and contribute to ongoing debates over the future of the international legal order. The outcome of this inquiry is not merely academic; it bears directly on how the international community confronts the growing instability of a world in which the norms restraining violence are increasingly contested and fragile.

Legal Framework of the Use of Force in International Law

The modern international legal order is built upon the fundamental premise that the use of force in international relations is, as a general rule, prohibited. This principle represents one of the most significant normative achievements of the post–Second World War system and reflects a collective determination to prevent the recurrence of catastrophic global conflict. The prohibition of the use of force is codified in Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter, which obliges all Member States to refrain “from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.” Legal scholars have consistently emphasized that this provision has attained the status of customary international law and constitutes a cornerstone of contemporary international relations (3). The binding character of Article 2(4) extends beyond treaty obligations and operates as a general rule applicable to all states, regardless of specific treaty commitments, reflecting what many authorities regard as a peremptory norm of international law (4). The Charter’s prohibition is inseparable from the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence, which together form the structural foundation of the international system (6). Sovereignty guarantees each state the exclusive authority to govern its internal affairs, territorial integrity protects the inviolability of state borders, and political independence shields states from coercive interference in their political processes. The erosion of any of these principles threatens the stability of international relations and undermines the collective security architecture carefully constructed after 1945 (5).

Despite the apparent clarity of Article 2(4), the prohibition of force has always existed in tension with the realities of international politics and security. While the Charter aims to eliminate war as a tool of national policy, it simultaneously recognizes that absolute pacifism is neither feasible nor desirable in a world of persistent security threats. Accordingly, the Charter provides limited and carefully circumscribed exceptions to the general prohibition. The first and most institutionally significant exception is the collective security system established under Chapter VII of the Charter. Under this framework, the Security Council is entrusted with the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security and is authorized to determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression. When peaceful measures prove inadequate, the Council may authorize the use of force by member states or by UN-mandated forces (5). This centralized mechanism reflects the Charter’s fundamental objective of replacing unilateral action with collective decision-making and legal accountability.

Scholars emphasize that Chapter VII represents the legal embodiment of the international community's commitment to preventing arbitrary or self-interested uses of force (3). However, the political nature of the Security Council, particularly the veto power of its permanent members, has frequently impeded decisive collective action, creating incentives for states to seek alternative legal justifications for military operations (2).

The second major exception to the prohibition of force is the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense, enshrined in Article 51 of the Charter. This provision acknowledges that states retain the right to defend themselves if an armed attack occurs, pending action by the Security Council. The interpretation of Article 51 has generated extensive legal debate, particularly concerning the scope and conditions of lawful self-defense. Traditional doctrine requires that self-defense be necessary, immediate, and proportionate to the armed attack suffered (10). Necessity demands that no reasonable peaceful alternatives exist; immediacy requires a close temporal connection between the attack and the defensive response; and proportionality limits the scale and scope of the defensive action to what is required to repel the attack (6). These criteria are not merely technical constraints but reflect deeper normative commitments to minimizing violence and preventing the escalation of armed conflict (4). The doctrine of collective self-defense further permits states to assist a victim of armed attack upon that state's request, reinforcing the collective dimension of international security (5). Yet the elasticity of self-defense arguments, especially in modern conflicts, has prompted growing concern that states are stretching Article 51 beyond its intended limits (8).

One of the most contentious developments in contemporary international law concerns the application of the self-defense doctrine to non-state actors. Classical international law conceived of armed conflict primarily as a phenomenon between sovereign states. However, modern security threats increasingly emanate from organized non-state groups capable of conducting sustained military operations across borders. The emergence of such actors has destabilized traditional legal categories and forced international law to confront new realities (9). Some states argue that the right of self-defense extends to situations in which a non-state actor operating from the territory of another state launches attacks of sufficient gravity, even if that territorial state is not directly responsible (10). Others caution that this interpretation risks undermining the sovereignty of states and weakening the prohibition of force (4). The central question is whether the unwillingness or inability of a territorial state to suppress a non-state threat justifies the use of force within its territory without its consent. While certain state practices suggest an emerging acceptance of this doctrine, many scholars warn that its legal foundation remains uncertain and deeply controversial (7). The Yemen conflict exemplifies this dilemma, as the Houthis function as a powerful non-state actor controlling significant territory while lacking international recognition as a government (18).

Closely related to this issue is the principle of territorial state consent. Under established international law, a state may lawfully invite foreign forces onto its territory to assist in addressing internal security threats. Such consent transforms what would otherwise be an unlawful intervention into a permissible act of cooperation (3). However, when consent is ambiguous, contested, or absent, the legality of external military action becomes highly problematic. In situations of fragmented authority, such as Yemen, determining which entity possesses the legal capacity to grant valid consent presents formidable challenges (19). The existence of competing claims to legitimacy within a state complicates the application of classical consent doctrines and raises fundamental questions about representation and sovereignty (20). The uncertainty surrounding consent in Yemen therefore intensifies the legal controversy surrounding external military involvement.

Beyond self-defense and collective security, modern international discourse has increasingly focused on humanitarian intervention and the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect. Humanitarian intervention refers to the use

of force by states to prevent or halt widespread human rights abuses in another state without the consent of that state's government. While morally compelling, this concept remains legally contentious (21). The Responsibility to Protect, endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2005, represents an attempt to reconcile state sovereignty with the imperative to prevent mass atrocities. It affirms that states bear primary responsibility for protecting their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, and that the international community may take collective action when a state manifestly fails to fulfill this duty (16). However, the legal mechanisms for implementing this responsibility remain firmly embedded within the existing Charter framework, requiring Security Council authorization for any military action (17). Scholars consistently stress the distinction between the moral legitimacy of humanitarian action and its strict legal permissibility under international law (22). This distinction is particularly significant in Yemen, where humanitarian suffering is acute, yet the legal avenues for external military intervention remain constrained by the Charter's rules (11).

The persistent gap between legality and legitimacy in the use of force reflects a deeper structural tension within international law. While legal rules aim to provide clear standards of conduct, the political realities of crisis response often generate pressures to act outside established legal channels (15). The risk is that repeated departures from legal constraints, even when motivated by humanitarian or security concerns, gradually normalize exceptional measures and weaken the authority of the legal order itself (23). The Yemen conflict thus illustrates how contemporary crises test the resilience of international law and expose the fragility of the normative consensus underpinning the prohibition of force (1). The legal framework governing the use of force remains the central safeguard against the descent into unregulated violence, yet its effectiveness ultimately depends on the willingness of states to accept law as a genuine constraint on power (2).

Legal Assessment of the Western Coalition's Actions in Yemen

The military operations conducted by the Western coalition against Houthi forces in Yemen constitute one of the most legally complex contemporary cases of the use of force. These operations have included sustained airstrikes, naval deployments, missile interceptions, and intelligence-supported targeting campaigns across Yemeni territory and adjacent maritime zones. Their publicly declared objectives have centered on safeguarding international navigation routes, deterring Houthi attacks on commercial and military vessels, and preventing further destabilization of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden regions, which are critical corridors for global trade (15). The scope of the operations has extended beyond isolated defensive engagements, evolving into coordinated military campaigns with strategic implications for the broader regional balance of power (2). Analysts emphasize that the intensity and geographic reach of these actions effectively situate them within the domain of international armed conflict, regardless of the non-state status of the Houthis (9). The coalition's involvement has therefore transformed the Yemeni conflict from a predominantly internal struggle into an internationalized confrontation, with profound legal consequences for all participating actors (23).

The central legal justification advanced by coalition members has been self-defense, specifically the claim that Houthi attacks on international shipping and military assets constitute armed attacks sufficient to trigger the inherent right of self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter. However, the application of this doctrine to the Yemen situation raises serious legal challenges. International law requires that self-defense be exercised only in response to an armed attack of sufficient gravity (3). While missile strikes and drone attacks on vessels may meet this threshold in isolated incidents, legal scholars caution that the concept of armed attack must not be diluted by

conflating sporadic hostile acts with the sustained, large-scale attacks traditionally contemplated by Article 51 (4). Moreover, the right of self-defense requires a demonstrable link between the alleged attack and the responding state, a condition that becomes increasingly problematic when the attacking entity is a non-state actor operating within the territory of another sovereign state (10). The Houthis' actions, though disruptive and dangerous, do not easily satisfy the classical legal paradigm of interstate armed attack, thus placing the coalition's reliance on self-defense under considerable legal strain (6).

Attribution further complicates the coalition's legal position. For self-defense to be lawfully invoked against a non-state actor, international jurisprudence has traditionally required that the armed attack be attributable to a state, either through direct involvement or effective control (4). In Yemen, although the Houthis receive varying degrees of external support, the legal threshold for attributing their conduct to another state remains highly contested (18). Without clear attribution, the coalition's actions risk bypassing the established legal safeguards designed to prevent the unilateral expansion of self-defense into a general license for cross-border military action (7). The coalition has also emphasized the immediacy of the threat posed by the Houthis, arguing that ongoing and imminent attacks necessitate preemptive or anticipatory measures. Yet the doctrine of immediacy requires a close temporal connection between the attack and the defensive response, and international legal authorities consistently warn that anticipatory self-defense must remain strictly limited to exceptional circumstances of overwhelming necessity (10). The pattern of sustained and geographically expansive coalition strikes raises doubts as to whether this criterion has been respected (8).

Proportionality and necessity, the final pillars of lawful self-defense, are equally contentious in this context. Proportionality does not permit the responding state to pursue broader strategic objectives beyond halting or repelling the specific attack, and necessity requires that force be employed only when no reasonable alternative measures exist (3). Observers have questioned whether extensive air campaigns and naval operations across Yemen exceed what is strictly required to address maritime threats, particularly when diplomatic and multilateral mechanisms remain available (5). Excessive reliance on military force risks transforming self-defense into punitive or coercive action, which international law explicitly forbids (4). The humanitarian impact of these operations, including civilian casualties and the destruction of infrastructure, further intensifies scrutiny of their proportionality (11). Reports documenting harm to non-combatants reinforce concerns that the coalition's conduct may violate not only the *jus ad bellum* but also fundamental principles of international humanitarian law (13).

The absence of explicit authorization from the UN Security Council represents another critical weakness in the coalition's legal position. While the Council has adopted multiple resolutions addressing the situation in Yemen and condemning violence, none have expressly authorized the use of force by the Western coalition against the Houthis (24). Under the Charter system, only the Security Council possesses the authority to sanction collective military action for the maintenance of international peace and security (5). Acting without such authorization undermines the collective security framework and reintroduces unilateralism into international relations, a development widely regarded as a regression from the Charter's normative achievements (3). The coalition's efforts to derive legitimacy from implicit approval or broad interpretations of existing resolutions remain legally fragile, as international law requires clear and specific mandates for the use of force (4). The resulting ambiguity weakens the legal coherence of the coalition's actions and raises serious concerns regarding compliance with the UN Charter (1).

The issue of Yemen's sovereignty stands at the center of the legal debate. Sovereignty and territorial integrity are among the most fundamental principles of international law, and any use of force within a state's territory without

its valid consent constitutes a *prima facie* violation of these principles (6). In Yemen, the fragmentation of political authority complicates the question of consent. While certain internationally recognized authorities have engaged with coalition partners, the Houthis' effective control over significant territory and population creates a contested environment in which the validity of consent is legally uncertain (19). Military intervention conducted without the clear and unequivocal consent of the legitimate government risks violating Yemen's sovereignty and contributing to the erosion of the territorial integrity norm (9). Such practices, if normalized, threaten to destabilize the entire international legal order by weakening the protective barrier that sovereignty provides against external coercion (2).

The coalition's actions also engage the law of state responsibility. Under international law, any internationally wrongful act attributable to a state gives rise to responsibility and the obligation to make full reparation (4). If the coalition's military operations are found to violate the prohibition on the use of force or to breach international humanitarian law, the participating states may incur international responsibility for resulting harm (8). This responsibility extends not only to direct acts but also to failures to prevent or punish violations committed by forces under their effective control (13). The scale of civilian suffering in Yemen, documented extensively by humanitarian organizations, strengthens the argument that serious breaches of international law may have occurred (12). In extreme cases, such violations may constitute international crimes, including war crimes or crimes against humanity, triggering potential jurisdiction of international criminal mechanisms (14).

Accountability for such violations remains one of the most difficult challenges in the Yemen conflict. Political constraints, jurisdictional limitations, and the reluctance of powerful states to submit their conduct to external scrutiny severely limit the effectiveness of existing accountability mechanisms (25). Nonetheless, international law continues to recognize the imperative of accountability as a core element of the international legal order, essential for deterrence, justice, and the restoration of peace (22). The failure to address violations in Yemen risks reinforcing a culture of impunity that undermines both the credibility and the authority of international law (16). Through this lens, the legal assessment of the Western coalition's actions reveals not merely a dispute over legal interpretation but a profound test of the international community's commitment to the rule of law in times of crisis (17).

Impact of the Intervention on Global Peace and International Order

The military intervention of the Western coalition in Yemen has generated consequences that extend far beyond the immediate battlefield and reach deeply into the structure of global peace and international order. Nowhere are these consequences more visible than in the humanitarian catastrophe that continues to unfold across Yemen and its surrounding region. Years of sustained armed conflict have devastated civilian life, producing mass casualties, widespread destruction of housing, hospitals, water systems, ports, and transportation networks, and the near collapse of Yemen's economy (11). International humanitarian organizations consistently report that millions of Yemenis remain dependent on emergency assistance for survival, while preventable diseases and malnutrition have reached crisis levels (12). The scale of civilian suffering is not an accidental by-product of war but the foreseeable result of sustained military operations in densely populated areas, compounded by blockades and restrictions on essential supplies (13). Scholars emphasize that such humanitarian breakdowns do not remain confined within national borders; they generate regional instability through refugee flows, transnational insecurity, and the proliferation of non-state armed groups (18). The Yemeni case thus demonstrates how modern armed interventions create cascading humanitarian and security consequences that destabilize entire regions rather than restore order (23).

The displacement crisis illustrates this destabilizing dynamic with particular clarity. Millions of Yemenis have been forced from their homes, either seeking refuge in other parts of the country or crossing borders into neighboring states. Such mass displacement places enormous strain on regional host communities and weakens already fragile political and economic systems (25). The resulting instability fuels further cycles of conflict, criminal networks, and radicalization, reinforcing the security dilemmas that the intervention was ostensibly intended to resolve (1). Humanitarian scholars warn that when armed interventions ignore the structural roots of conflict and focus narrowly on military objectives, they often intensify the very conditions that sustain long-term violence (16). In Yemen, the destruction of infrastructure and livelihoods has undermined prospects for sustainable peace and locked large segments of the population into dependency and vulnerability (14).

Beyond its humanitarian toll, the intervention has had profound implications for the collective security system established by the United Nations Charter. The post-1945 international order was designed to replace unilateral uses of force with multilateral decision-making under the authority of the Security Council. This system was intended to ensure that military power would be exercised only in accordance with collective judgment and legal oversight (5). However, the Yemen intervention reflects a growing tendency among powerful states to act outside this framework, either by invoking expansive interpretations of self-defense or by relying on ad hoc coalitions rather than formal UN authorization (3). Such practices erode the credibility of the collective security system and weaken the institutional foundations of global peace (4). Analysts caution that once unilateral military action becomes normalized, the authority of the Security Council is diminished, and the principle of legal constraint on force is replaced by geopolitical calculation (2).

This erosion of collective security creates dangerous precedents. When influential states employ force without explicit Security Council approval and face few consequences, other states may follow suit, leading to a proliferation of unilateral interventions and the gradual disintegration of the Charter's normative framework (6). The Yemen case thus risks becoming a reference point for future conflicts in which legal authorization is treated as optional rather than essential (8). International law scholars warn that such developments undermine not only the specific rules governing the use of force but the broader legitimacy of international law as a system of governance (22). The weakening of the Charter framework ultimately threatens the stability of the international system itself, as the absence of effective legal constraints encourages arms races, alliance polarization, and the escalation of regional conflicts (15).

The long-term effects of the Yemen intervention on international peace are equally concerning. One of the most significant trends emerging from recent decades of conflict is the gradual normalization of military force as a routine instrument of foreign policy. The Yemen campaign contributes to this pattern by reinforcing the perception that strategic objectives can be pursued through sustained armed operations with limited regard for international legal constraints (9). This normalization of force undermines efforts to resolve disputes through diplomacy and multilateral negotiation, reducing the incentives for peaceful conflict resolution (17). Security analysts note that when military solutions are privileged over political compromise, conflicts tend to become more protracted, complex, and resistant to settlement (1). In Yemen, the entrenchment of armed intervention has hardened positions on all sides and narrowed the space for meaningful peace negotiations (24).

Increased volatility in global security relations represents another critical consequence of the intervention. The Yemen conflict has become a focal point of broader geopolitical rivalries, drawing in regional and extra-regional powers and intensifying competition across the Middle East and beyond (2). This entanglement of local conflict with

global strategic interests heightens the risk of miscalculation and escalation, particularly in an international environment already characterized by declining trust and rising power competition (23). Scholars emphasize that such volatility undermines the predictability and stability upon which international peace depends (3). The erosion of shared legal norms governing the use of force further compounds this instability, as states increasingly rely on unilateral judgments of necessity and legitimacy rather than collectively agreed rules (4).

The implications of the Yemen intervention for the future of international law are therefore profound. The risk of normative fragmentation looms large as states adopt divergent interpretations of core legal principles such as self-defense, sovereignty, and humanitarian intervention (19). When fundamental rules are applied inconsistently or selectively, the coherence of the legal system deteriorates, and international law loses its capacity to provide a common framework for regulating state behavior (6). This fragmentation weakens compliance incentives and encourages the perception that international law is merely an instrument of power rather than a genuine normative order (8). The Yemen case thus illustrates how repeated departures from established legal standards can accelerate the erosion of the international legal system from within (22).

At the same time, the Yemen crisis highlights the urgent need for legal reform and stronger enforcement mechanisms. Scholars and practitioners increasingly argue that the existing legal architecture, while normatively robust, lacks the institutional capacity to prevent or effectively respond to contemporary conflicts involving non-state actors, hybrid warfare, and complex humanitarian emergencies (7). Strengthening accountability mechanisms, enhancing the role of international courts, and reforming Security Council procedures are among the proposals advanced to restore the credibility and effectiveness of the international legal order (16). Without such reforms, the gap between legal ideals and political practice is likely to widen, further undermining global peace and security (17).

In sum, the Western coalition's intervention in Yemen has reshaped not only the trajectory of the Yemeni conflict but also the broader architecture of international peace and international law. Its humanitarian, institutional, and normative consequences reveal a pattern of destabilization that threatens the foundations of the postwar international order. The Yemen case serves as a powerful reminder that the use of force, even when pursued in the name of security or stability, carries systemic risks that extend far beyond any single conflict.

Conclusion

The conflict in Yemen and the military actions undertaken by the Western coalition against the Houthis represent far more than a localized security crisis. They expose deep structural tensions within contemporary international law and reveal the fragile balance between legal norms, political power, and humanitarian responsibility. This study has demonstrated that the intervention, while framed by coalition members as a necessary response to urgent security threats, raises profound legal concerns under the established framework governing the use of force. The cumulative analysis of the legal rules, their application to the facts on the ground, and the broader systemic consequences of the intervention underscores the gravity of the challenge facing the international community in preserving a rule-based international order.

At the legal level, the intervention highlights the growing difficulty of applying traditional doctrines to modern conflicts characterized by non-state actors, fragmented sovereignty, and transnational security threats. The attempt to justify extensive military operations through expanded interpretations of self-defense reflects a broader trend in which exceptional measures risk becoming normalized practice. Such developments weaken the prohibition on the use of force and blur the line between lawful defense and strategic coercion. The absence of explicit authorization

from the United Nations Security Council further complicates the coalition's legal position and illustrates the declining centrality of collective security mechanisms in crisis management.

Beyond questions of legality, the humanitarian impact of the intervention stands as a stark reminder of the human cost of unresolved geopolitical disputes. The destruction of infrastructure, displacement of populations, and erosion of basic living conditions in Yemen reveal how military solutions, when pursued without parallel political settlement, can entrench suffering and prolong instability. Rather than restoring peace, the continued reliance on force has contributed to cycles of violence that undermine prospects for durable conflict resolution and deepen the humanitarian emergency.

The Yemen case also carries significant implications for global peace and security. By weakening the authority of multilateral institutions and encouraging unilateral approaches to conflict, the intervention contributes to a more volatile and fragmented international environment. When states increasingly rely on their own assessments of legitimacy and necessity, the shared normative framework that underpins international stability erodes. This process threatens to replace cooperation with competition, legal restraint with strategic calculation, and collective responsibility with selective engagement.

Perhaps most importantly, the Yemen conflict illustrates the urgent need to reaffirm the central role of international law in regulating the use of force. Without renewed commitment to legal principles, accountability mechanisms, and multilateral cooperation, the international system risks sliding toward a condition in which power, rather than law, determines outcomes. Such a trajectory would not only weaken the authority of international institutions but also diminish the prospects for sustainable peace in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.

The future of international peace depends on the ability of states to resist the temptation of expedient solutions and to invest instead in long-term, legally grounded strategies for conflict prevention and resolution. The lessons of Yemen underscore that military interventions, however technologically sophisticated or politically justified, cannot substitute for inclusive diplomacy, respect for sovereignty, and genuine engagement with the underlying causes of conflict. Only by strengthening legal norms, enhancing institutional accountability, and prioritizing human security over short-term strategic interests can the international community hope to prevent similar crises and preserve the fragile architecture of global order.

In this sense, Yemen is not merely a case study of a single conflict but a critical test of the international system itself. The choices made in response to this crisis will shape the evolution of international law and the credibility of the rules that govern the use of force. Whether the international community emerges from this period with a stronger, more resilient legal order or with a weakened and fragmented system will depend on the willingness of states to place law, cooperation, and humanity at the center of their approach to peace and security.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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