

Opening the Road to Besieged Taiz City: Easing Travel vs. Continued Hardship



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By: Wissam Mohammed

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Cover photo: A car passes through the Al-Hawd roundabout exit toward Al-Hawban on June 13, 2024, following the reopening of Al-Qasr road in Taiz city after nine years of siege // Sana'a Center photo by Ahmed al-Basha.



The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

The strategic Al-Qasr road, connecting the heart of Taiz city to the eastern entrance of Al-Hawban, a major industrial area, was finally reopened on June 13, 2024, by the Houthi group (*Ansar Allah*). This development marked the end of a nine-year siege that had encircled Taiz from three sides. The reopening of the road has significantly alleviated the arduous journey for travelers to and from Taiz, who previously had to navigate treacherous, secondary roads winding around Jabal Sabir, the mountain that borders the city from the south. Previously, travel from the city center to the eastern part of Taiz could take up to six hours; now, the same journey can be completed in less than half an hour.

Nevertheless, the circumstances surrounding the reopening are far from ideal. The lack of a formal political agreement or security and military arrangements raises questions about the sustainability of this development. While the reopening has eased the burden of travel, it has simultaneously imposed additional strains on the besieged city with an influx of returning residents amidst crumbling public services and ongoing difficulties in obtaining essential supplies.

The road's reopening was timed to coincide with Eid al-Adha, enabling countless residents of Taiz to reunite with their relatives for the holiday. The influx persisted even after the festivities, driven by the need for urgent medical care and travel documentation. With the lifting of the blockade on the Al-Qasr road, a wave of citizens poured into Taiz city from eastern districts and other governorates controlled by the Houthis. The government's Office of Siege Affairs, established in March of this year by the Taiz local authority, **documented** a surge in crossings during the first month following the opening of the road. A staggering 778,157 individuals traversed the route, with 487,470 entering Taiz and 290,687 departing the **city**. On average, 27,791 people crossed daily, even with the road's limited daytime hours. In total, 129,695 vehicles traversed the route during this period. Of this figure, 81,245 cars entered Taiz city, while 48,450 exited, resulting in a daily average of 4,632 vehicles passing through.

A notable trend has emerged, with factory workers situated east of the city now able to return to their families within the city limits for the weekend. Additionally, many Taiz residents who were displaced early in the war have returned, evidenced by the surge in enrollment at both public and private schools compared to previous years. The growing demand for housing and the subsequent increase in rental prices further underscore this demographic shift.

Taiz has suffered isolation and hardship during the prolonged siege. Despite repeated calls for humanitarian relief, negotiations to reopen roads repeatedly failed, and the Houthi group maintained a blockade on the city. The Stockholm Agreement (2018) included provisions for consultations on reopening roads in Taiz, but this proved unsuccessful. Following the announcement of a truce in April 2022, UN **Special Envoy** for Yemen Hans Grundberg asserted that all parties had committed

to meeting under UN auspices to agree on the re-opening of roads in Taiz and other governorates. On July 3, he presented an updated proposal outlining a phased approach to reopening these vital routes, with an initial phase that would focus on reopening four main roads in Taiz. The Houthis rejected the proposal.

The unilateral opening of the road on the eastern side of Taiz by the Houthis, ostensibly aimed to ease the travel burden on Taiz residents, has therefore been met with skepticism regarding its underlying motivations. Some **analysts** have linked the reopening to the concurrent opening of secondary roads in other areas, suggesting a correlation with the Houthis' military operations in the Red Sea. The Houthis' burgeoning regional ambitions have ignited skepticism concerning their genuine intentions in confronting Israel. The reopening is likewise a calculated effort to rehabilitate their image amidst heightened international scrutiny of the Yemeni conflict and domestic awareness of their ruthless and indiscriminate victimization of unarmed civilians. It was evident that one of the primary objectives was propaganda, as the initiative to reopen the road was led by **Nasreddine Amer**, Chairman of the Houthi-controlled news agency Saba. Amer's media efforts have consistently focused on improving the group's public image abroad, particularly through live broadcasts whenever the Houthis face criticism.

From a Houthi standpoint, Taiz's independence - with the exception of seven districts - is a temporary situation. This is evident in their military and security actions, as well as in the choice of the route that was reopened. The road is located in a dangerous military zone, overlooked by mounds where snipers are positioned and surrounded by trenches that the Houthis continue to expand. On June 15, the local authority of the internationally recognized government **declared** an initiative to open the Oseifera-Al-Sitteen road to expedite the transit of heavy-duty vehicles and essential commodities into the beleaguered city, as the Gawlat al-Qasr-Taiz road remains limited to light transportation and operates exclusively during daylight hours. The Houthis, however, did not respond to the initiative; instead, they insisted on their own proposal to open a secondary, unpaved backroad connecting Al-Sitteen to Al-Nour Medical City in northern Taiz. Abdelkarim Shiban, the head of the government's negotiating committee for road opening, **denounced** this proposal, asserting that the Houthis were merely "seeking to establish military access routes."

There are other indications that the Houthis' objectives are predominantly military. Their operatives have continued excavating tunnels on both sides of the Al-Qasr road, and armed Houthi-affiliated cells attempting to penetrate the city have been **apprehended**. Following the opening of the Al-Qasr road, the Houthis intensified their attacks on multiple fronts surrounding the city of Taiz despite the informal ceasefire. Notably, they escalated attacks on areas adjacent to the southern Al-Dhabab route, the city's lifeline for the delivery of goods and essential supplies. This critical route connects Taiz city to its western rural side and, via treacherous roads, to Lahj governorate and the city of Aden. According to the **Media Center** of the

Islah-affiliated Taiz Military Axis, the Houthis carried out 22 military operations, including infiltrations, artillery shelling, and drone attacks between June 17 and August 19. Eight of these attacks concentrated around the Al-Dhabab front, primarily consisting of artillery bombardments.

While the opening of the road alleviated the suffering of travelers and enabled many to reunite with their families and access medical services and urban amenities, it simultaneously imposed a strain on public services, particularly in the healthcare sector. The Office of Siege Affairs reported that 6,851 patients sought treatment at healthcare facilities in the month following the road's opening. Al-Amal Oncology Center experienced a 242-case increase, while the Cardiovascular Center recorded 450 additional patients. Dialysis centers at the Republican Hospital and Al-Thawra General Hospital witnessed a combined surge of 70 cases. As a result, dialysis centers were forced to operate four shifts daily.^[1] The immense strain on hospitals and specialized medical centers due to the influx of patients was exacerbated by limited capacity, insufficient operational budgets, and inadequate support. On July 24, [media sources](#) reported a complete halt of all operations at Al-Thawra General Hospital, and dialysis sessions were suspended due to a critical shortage of diesel fuel. The Republican Hospital reached the brink of a similar crisis. In a post on X, Amer, the Houthi official, [commented](#) on the situation, affirming that "the Ministry of Health in Sana'a is prepared to take action" and provide relief to Al-Thawra Hospital. Conversely, a report by the Office of Siege Affairs elucidated that the heightened demand for healthcare in the besieged city can be attributed to the Houthi authorities' neglect in furnishing essential medical services within their territories or their provision of such services at prohibitively high prices. Overall, the situation points to the general exploitation of Taiz residents' suffering for political purposes.

The opening of the Al-Qasr road has also been marred by numerous hardships imposed on travelers. Owners of vehicles bearing newly issued license plates from the internationally recognized government have been [compelled](#) to undergo customs clearance and pay substantial fees. A road intended for the passage of vehicles transporting goods and commodities, including those coming from Taiz factories in Al-Hawban or from Aden via the Houthi-controlled Al-Rahidah area, remains closed. Alternative routes to Aden continue to be plagued by weekly vehicular mishaps, endangering both cargo and passengers. In a recent [accident](#), a passenger bus rolled over on a detour known as Karbah al-Sahi, claiming the lives of 14 people, including children.

^[1] Report from the Office of Siege Affairs, Taiz governorate, obtained by the author.

After a nine-year siege, the reopening of the Al-Qasr road to the city of Taiz represents an important breakthrough and has restored residents' hopes for an end to their multifaceted suffering. But so far, the impact of this development has been limited to facilitating movement and easing the burden of travel. The major challenge remains the reopening of other routes - especially the Taiz-Aden road - which would hasten the flow of goods and alleviate the economic hardships faced by the residents. Moreover, a permanent end to the siege of Taiz city will need to be governed by a comprehensive political framework and international guarantees.

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