

# The Yemen Review

AUGUST 2019



## THE SOUTHERN IMPLOSION



## The Yemen Review

**The Yemen Review** Launched in June 2016, The Yemen Review – formerly known as Yemen at the UN – is a monthly publication produced by the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. It aims to identify and assess current diplomatic, economic, political, military, security, humanitarian and human rights developments related to Yemen.

In producing The Yemen Review, Sana'a Center staff throughout Yemen and around the world gather information, conduct research, hold private meetings with local, regional, and international stakeholders, and analyze the domestic and international context surrounding developments in and regarding Yemen.

This monthly series is designed to provide readers with a contextualized insight into the country's most important ongoing issues.

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### COVER PHOTO:

*The Dhamar detention center lies in ruins on September 3, 2019, after multiple airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition hit the facility on September 1, 2019, killing more than 120 prisoners // Photo Credit: Saqr Abu Hassan*

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A group of Red Crescent volunteers and a soldier search the rubble for bodies on September 3, 2019 // Photo credit: Saqr Abu Hassan.

# The Sana'a Center Editorial

## Where Coalitions Come to Die

Yemen is the cemetery of invaders, or so the ancient proverb goes, and today it is certainly the burial ground of foreign military coalitions. In 2015, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) sent their armed forces to lead a regional intervention into Yemen, thinking it would last only weeks. Why wouldn't they? Two of the richest countries in the world, backed by the most powerful Western countries, were waging war in one of the world's poorest nations. Their announced aim was to restore Yemen's internationally recognized government to power after the armed Houthi movement, also known as Ansar Allah, ousted it from the capital, Sana'a, in a *coup d'état*.

Fast forward four years: Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, which entered the Yemeni conflict shoulder-to-shoulder, have turned on each other in a proxy war. In August, UAE-backed local groups carried out a new coup against the same Yemeni government, this time in its interim capital of Aden, while Emirati aircraft bombed the its Saudi-supported troops.

The Houthi leadership and its regional backer, Iran, must be delighted. Their Yemeni foes are at each other's throats and in breaking ranks have undermined each other's

raisons d'être. Now bereft of both the capital and its interim capital, the Saudi-backed Yemeni government's claim to legitimacy is more tenuous than ever. Meanwhile, the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC), whose affiliated forces drove the government out of Aden, can no longer conceivably claim to represent all southerners given how local forces and government troops cooperated in rebuffing STC advances in Shabwa governorate, east of Aden.

This is not to say that the southern cause is not a just one; it is. The 1990 unification of Yemen's north and south, the 1994 civil war and the decades of disenfranchisement that followed for southerners left open wounds that justifiably fed aspirations for a return to independence. However, traditional leaders of the southern cause — many hailing from South Yemen's Marxist era — lost their moral high ground in August when they bit their tongues as Hani bin Breik, a ruthless religious zealot bent on purging northerners from Aden, became the face of southern empowerment.

Bin Breik is a militant Salafi extremist whose affinity for stirring sectarian hatred and social divisions rivals that of Qasim al-Raimi, the head of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and the leader of the armed Houthi movement, Abdelmalek al-Houthi. Aden's *al-Hizam al-Amni*, or "Security Belt" forces — backed by the UAE, allied to the STC and commanded by a handful of Salafi leaders including Bin Breik — are implicated in a recent [report by UN-appointed experts](#) in kidnapping, torture, extortion, sexual violence, murder, running secret prisons and carrying out assassinations in the city.

Security Belt Brig. Gen. Muneer al-Mashali, better known as Abu al-Yamama and dozens of other soldiers were killed in a Houthi drone or missile attack on an Aden military base on August 1. In response, Bin Breik orchestrated a purge against northerners in Aden, with beatings in the streets, businesses shut down, and northerners rounded up en masse, forced onto buses and deported. Following Al-Yamama's funeral, Bin Breik led an armed assault to rout the internationally recognized Yemeni government from Aden and elsewhere in the south.

Notably, Bin Breik's men were armed with American made-weapons paid for by the UAE and politically supported by western lobbyist firms such Independent Diplomat and Quatro. Abu Dhabi's support for Bin Breik, and many other similarly unsavory characters in Yemen — such as the Salafi militia leader Abu al-Abbas in Taiz who is designated as a supporter of terrorism by the United States treasury — is telling of its unscrupulous approach to the war and its disregard for Yemeni sovereignty. In a purely functional sense though, Abu Dhabi has at least empowered local proxies that have a plausible chance of achieving its desired ends, regardless of how immoral or illegal those ends might be. By contrast, Riyadh threw its lot behind one of the most corrupt and incapable statesmen in recent history, Yemeni President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

The Saudi leadership's typical approach to problem-solving is to essentially throw money at something until it goes away. But no matter how many billions of dollars' worth of weapons Riyadh has bought to bomb Yemen, it must be appallingly clear by now that this is akin to throwing cash off of a cliff and hoping to fill the ocean. At the heart of why this spending and bombing has been futile is the Yemeni president. Hadi is not the one making the most money from this war — far from it — but he occupies the most important decision-making post of any Yemeni and yet as a decision-

maker he is inept. This absence of leadership at the top was exemplified by Hadi's silence throughout the events in August, and has been a key factor underlying almost every step of Yemen's dissolution since 2012, when Hadi became president through an uncontested election largely arranged by Riyadh. Indeed, it was Hadi's firing of prominent southerners from government posts that helped spur the creation of the STC in 2017. The fact that the Saudis have, for seven years now, tied their fate in Yemen to Hadi says much about Riyadh's capacity for forethought or even learning.

In August the Saudi narrative, as well as the legal basis for its intervention in Yemen, unraveled. United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2216, passed in April 2015, highlighted the Yemeni government's request that Gulf countries assist in its return to power. The Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition has claimed this document offers legal legitimacy for their military intervention in Yemen. This claim is now preposterous. The UAE is actively supporting a military front against the Yemeni government. Emirati actions may well violate Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of force in another state if it does not have that state's consent, if there is no UNSC authorization, or it's not in self-defense. The overarching war in Yemen has now become tripartite – the Houthis vs the Saudi-backed Yemeni government vs the UAE-backed STC – and a new UNSC resolution is badly needed to address the current reality.

Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, once big brother and little brother, have lost their fraternity in Yemen's burial grounds. Their money did not buy a quick victory, but four years on it is still paying to fill more Yemeni graves.

# The Southern Implosion

## *Overview*

August saw the Saudi-Emirati military coalition implode as its partners in southern Yemen turned on each other in dramatic fashion. This followed a Houthi strike on a military camp in Aden on August 1 that killed a top southern commander and provided the catalyst for a separatist group's takeover of the city, which is the interim capital of Yemen's internationally recognized government.

Security Belt forces affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council (STC) – both of which are supported by the United Arab Emirates – seized government buildings and military camps over just four days of fighting, with the fall of the presidential palace on August 10 signaling the eviction of the Yemeni government from Aden.

The STC claimed that it actually supported Yemen's Saudi-backed president, Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi, but that its quarrel was with the Islah party – the Islamist movement that is viewed with suspicion in much of the south but is also Hadi's most important Yemeni ally. In the days that followed, the STC laid out its demands for an independent federal state in the south while Security Belt militiamen rounded up, assaulted and forcibly evicted numerous northern Yemenis who were in Aden.

The Hadi government denounced what it called an armed rebellion facilitated with UAE support, allegations that Abu Dhabi – which recently carried out a military draw-down in parts of Yemen – denied. STC-aligned forces then set their sights beyond Aden, seizing military bases in neighboring Abyan and clashing with government forces in Shabwa governorate. These advances were quickly reversed, however, in a government counterattack in which pro-Hadi forces rapidly advanced on the STC's Aden stronghold in the final week of August, but could not retake the city. An already eventful month ended with the UAE launching airstrikes targeting Saudi-backed government forces in Aden and Abyan, after which the Yemeni government called on the UN Security Council to intervene.

## *The STC's Takeover of Aden*

On August 1, Gen. Muneer al-Mashali, better known as Abu al-Yamama, and more than 30 other Security Belt soldiers were killed in a Houthi attack on Al-Jalaa military base in the Buraiqah district of Aden. Abu al-Yamama was the commander of the 1st Support Brigade within the UAE-backed Security Belt forces and a staunch southern separatist. His death sparked an outcry and **allegations** of Islah-Houthi collusion from the STC leadership.<sup>[1]</sup>

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[1] "Hani Ben Brik accuses the government and the Islah party of being behind the Jalaa camp attack," Al-Mawqea Post, August 6, 2019, <https://almawqea.net/news/42506>.



Following the August 1 attack, Security Belt forces operating in southern Yemen carried out and enabled retaliatory attacks against civilians from northern governorates, **the UN Human Rights Office said** on August 6.<sup>[2]</sup> Civilians from Yemen's north were rounded up, assaulted and forcibly displaced, with hundreds subjected to physical assaults, arbitrary arrests, detention, and having their property looted as security forces searched hotels and restaurants, demanding to see civilians' identification.

Tension in the city swelled as STC supporters arrived for the soldiers' funeral on August 7. Armed battles broke out between the STC's Security Belt forces and the government's Presidential Brigade as mourners approached the Ma'ashiq presidential palace. STC Vice President Hani bin Breik then **called** on STC forces to march on the palace and overthrow what he termed the pro-Islah government, blaming the Islamist party for the clashes.<sup>[3]</sup>

Fighting spread through the city in the following days, and Security Belt forces seized control of government buildings and military bases, while the few ministers present in Aden at the time fled the city. By August 10, high-level defections within the Presidential Brigade and the surrender of pro-government forces at Ma'ashiq palace completed the takeover. A senior government security official told the Sana'a Center that STC forces controlled only the lower level of the compound, with about a dozen US special forces and about 60 Saudi special forces soldiers remaining in place and in control elsewhere inside.<sup>[4]</sup> Coalition Spokesman Col. Turki al-Maliki called for an immediate ceasefire and an STC withdrawal,<sup>[5]</sup> with Saudi airstrikes hitting Aden that night, breaking the conspicuous silence from Saudi Arabia as hostilities in the interim capital escalated. In a **series** of tweets, Interior Minister Ahmed al-Maysari had criticized the absence of comment until then from either President Hadi or Saudi Arabia.<sup>[6]</sup>

As thousands attended a pro-STC rally in Aden on August 15, the STC released a **manifesto** calling for a federal independent state in the south.<sup>[7]</sup> It also said that Yemenis of northern origin would be required to carry identification cards and rejected the presence of "northern forces" in historically southern areas. In words that foreshadowed events in the coming weeks, the STC declared its intention to "liberate" parts of Hadramawt and Shabwa governorates.

[2] "Press briefing note on Yemen," UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, August 6, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24871&LangID=E>.

[3] HanibinBreik, TwitterPost, August 7, 2019, 3:54pm, <https://twitter.com/HaniBinbrek/status/1159085348074545152>

[4] Sana'a Center confidential interview with a senior government security official, Sept. 1, 2019.

[5] "Saudi-led Arab Coalition calls for immediate ceasefire in Aden," Saudi Gazette, August 11, 2019, <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/574420>.

[6] The verified account belonging to Ahmed Al-Maysari has since been suspended. Original URL: <https://twitter.com/AhmedAlmysari/status/1160539735875563521>.

[7] "The Southern Transitional Council issues an important political statement," STC Official Website, August 15, 2019. <https://stcaden.com/news/10116>.

## *Separatists Push into Abyan, Shabwa; Government Forces Counterattack*

Following the STC's Aden offensive, Saudi Arabia attempted to bring the STC and the Yemeni government to Jeddah for talks, though the positions of the two parties appeared intractable. The Yemeni government, which said it would not begin talks without an STC pullback, **claimed** on August 17 that the STC had agreed to such a withdrawal,<sup>[8]</sup> only for the STC to outright **reject** the claim.<sup>[9]</sup> The government proceeded to dismiss and indict STC-aligned figures occupying government positions at the time of the takeover, including **Aden's security director**, Maj. Gen. Shalal Ali Shaye'a.<sup>[10]</sup> Citing a Yemeni official, **Reuters reported** that the two sides began indirect talks in Jeddah on September 4.<sup>[11]</sup> However, Yemeni government spokesperson Rageh Badi later denied to the Sana'a Center that any direct or indirect consultations had occurred between the government and STC, characterizing the Reuters story as "incorrect".<sup>[11]</sup>

Meanwhile, the Security Belt forces turned their attention beyond Aden, **taking over** two government military bases in the neighboring Abyan governorate following clashes with pro-Hadi forces on August 19.<sup>[12]</sup> On August 22, fighting **began** in Ataq City, Shabwa governorate, between the UAE-backed Shabwa Elite Forces and the pro-Hadi 21st Mechanized Brigade.<sup>[13]</sup> The battle for control of Ataq continued over the following days and on August 25, Saudi Arabia and the UAE **announced** a joint committee to supervise a ceasefire in the governorate, with Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalik **arriving** in Shabwa on the same day.<sup>[14]</sup> Government forces then **took over** Shabwa Elite positions in the governorate, including the coastal town of Belhaf – the location of the Shabwa Elite headquarters and the Yemen LNG export terminal which, despite being offline throughout the conflict, remains a crown jewel of Yemen's hydrocarbon industry.<sup>[15]</sup> On August 28, Governor of Abyan Abu Bakr Hussein Salem announced that pro-Hadi forces had **re-established** control over the entire governorate.<sup>[16]</sup> However, major clashes in Abyan in the days following contradicted the governor's statement.

[8] Moamaral-Eryani, Twitter Post, August 17, 2019, 12:42pm, <https://twitter.com/ERYANIM/status/1162661075814354945>.

[9] HanibinBreik, Twitter Post, August 17, 2019, 7:15pm, <https://twitter.com/HaniBinbrek/status/1162759947727331328>.

[10] The verified account belonging to Ahmed al-Maysari has since been suspended. Original URL: <https://twitter.com/AhmedAlmysari/status/1161590137077338113>.

[11] "Yemen's govt starts indirect talks with southern separatists in Saudi Arabia," Reuters, September 4, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/yemens-govt-starts-indirect-talks-with-southern-separatists-in-saudi-arabia-officials-idUSKCN1VP1Q6>.

[12] "Yemeni separatists extend control in south, Saudi-led forces strike capital," Reuters, August 19, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-sanaa/clashes-hit-yemens-south-saudi-led-forces-strike-capital-idUSKCN1V91UG?il=0>.

[13] "Command of the joint forces of "Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen" stresses necessity of commitment by all parties in Shabwa province to continued ceasefire, maintaining truce," Saudi Press Agency, August 26, 2019, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/viewfullstory.php?lang=en&newsid=1961765#1961765>.

[14] "Prime Minister arrives and holds a meeting with Shabwa governor in the presence of ministers and military leaders," Al-Masdar Online, August 26, 2019. <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/171016>.

[15] "Ben Adayo: Shabwa toppled the coup of the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Militias," Al-Masdar Online, August 26, 2019. <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/171017>.

[16] "Abyan governor says army controlled whole province," September Net, August 28, 2019. <http://en.26sepnews.net/2019/08/28/abyan-governor-says-army-controlled-whole-province/>.

The Yemeni government counterattack continued toward STC-held Aden, where its forces stormed the city's airport and eastern suburbs.<sup>[17]</sup> The government **said** the UAE launched airstrikes August 29 against its positions in Aden and Abyan and called for action from the international community – specifically the UN Security Council.<sup>[18]</sup> Later that night, the UAE **released** a statement confirming it had launched the strikes, which it said targeted “elements of terrorist organizations” that had attacked “Arab coalition forces,” at Aden airport.<sup>[19]</sup> Yemen's Ministry of Foreign Affairs **requested** the UN Security Council intervene regarding the airstrikes while Hadi's office **called** on Saudi Arabia to take action against its coalition partner.<sup>[20][21]</sup>

As August came to a close, the STC held its ground in Aden. The senior government security official who spoke to the Sana'a Center on condition of anonymity said the STC owed its success thus far in Aden to Abdel Rahman Sheikh, a Salafi among the STC leadership whose troops had secured most of the city.<sup>[22]</sup>

### ***Life in Aden: Mass Casualties, Hospitals Overwhelmed; Road, Airport Closures***

Fighting and attacks in Aden left hundreds dead and injured in August. On August 1, a Houthi-claimed strike on a military graduation ceremony and an Islamic State group (IS) bombing near a police station **killed at least 51 people**.<sup>[23]</sup> The next day, **at least 20 troops** were killed when Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) overran a Security Belt military base [see ‘**AQAP, IS Strikes Intensify**’].<sup>[24]</sup> **Seven AQAP militants and one soldier were killed** in Abyan on August 3 as Security Belt forces pursued the attackers.<sup>[25]</sup>

Fighting between Security Belt forces and government troops from August 7 to August 10 left up to 40 people dead and 260 injured, according to **the UN humanitarian coordinator's office**;<sup>[26]</sup> local officials said **more than 70 people** were killed, including

[17] “Yemen government forces storm Aden, seize airport: residents, officials,” Reuters, August 28, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/yemen-government-forces-storm-aden-seize-airport-residents-officials-idUSKCN1V1109>.

[18] “Government condemns UAE air strikes on National Army forces in Aden and Abyan,” Saba Net, August 29, 2019. <https://www.sabanew.net/viewstory/53206>.

[19] “Statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation,” Emirates News Agency (WAM), August 29, 2019. <https://www.wam.ae/ar/details/1395302782841>.

[20] Yemen Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Twitter Post, August 29, 2019, 11:00pm. [https://twitter.com/yemen\\_mofa/status/1167165058981351424](https://twitter.com/yemen_mofa/status/1167165058981351424).

[21] “The Presidency renews its request to Saudi Arabia to intervene to stop the UAE interference,” Saba Net, August 29, 2019. <https://www.sabanew.net/viewstory/53232>.

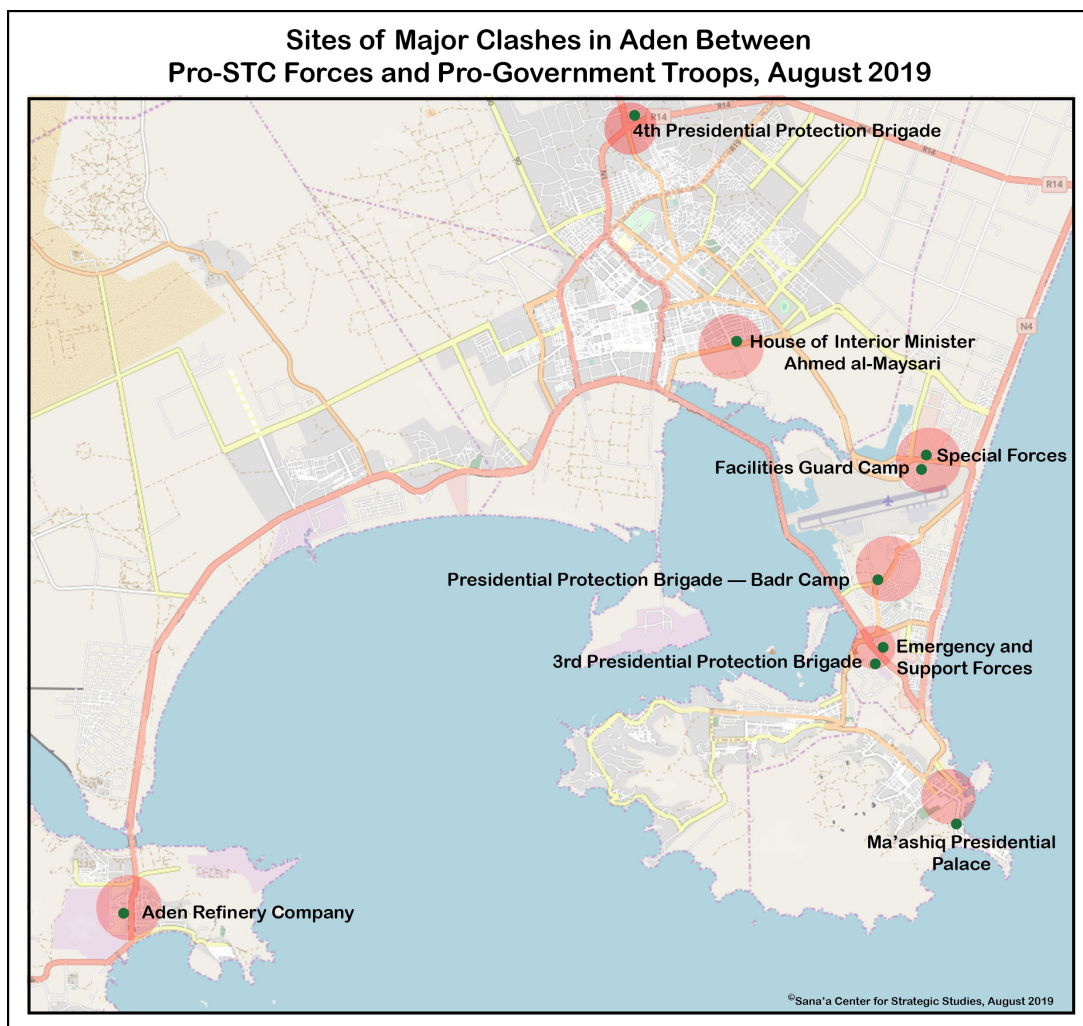
[22] Sana'a Center confidential interview with a senior government security official, Sept. 1, 2019.

[23] Maggie Michael and Ahmed al-Haj, “Rebel missile, suicide attack kill dozens in Yemen,” The Associated Press, August 1, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/6f1e4bc9e50d47458ba067b4cfea6d77>.

[24] Ahmed al-Haj, “Yemen officials: Al-Qaida kills at least 20 at militant camp,” The Associated Press, August 2, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/9e13d75246714948aae733b67b92af98>.

[25] Ahmed al-Haj, “Yemen officials: Forces pursue al-Qaida militants, 8 dead,” The Associated Press, August 3, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/336d0a1ad9cd4dbaaa5900a5a2c8ac22>.

[26] “Scores of civilians killed and wounded by fighting in Aden,” UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, August 11, 2019, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HC%20Statement\\_Sanaa\\_11%20August\\_FINAL\\_pdf.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HC%20Statement_Sanaa_11%20August_FINAL_pdf.pdf).



fighters and civilians.<sup>[27]</sup> Médecins Sans Frontières said its hospital in Aden received **119 patients in 24 hours** on August 8.<sup>[28]</sup> Most of the wounded were civilians who were likely injured by mortar fire or stray bullets, while five people were dead on arrival, including a child, MSF said. The **International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC)** said on August 12 that hospitals in Aden were in need of basic supplies, adding that some civilians wounded in the fighting had died because they were unable to reach health facilities.<sup>[29]</sup>

The fighting in densely populated parts of Aden left civilians trapped, the **Norwegian Refugee Council** said on August 10, warning that roads were closed, shops were shut and damage to one of Aden's main water tanks had cut off drinking water supplies.<sup>[30]</sup>

[27] Ahmed al-Haj and Samy Madgy, "Security officials: Yemen separatists control city of Aden," The Associated Press, August 11, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/f0beacfa9cd14efa85b197e8fe3af470>.

[28] "Yemen: MSF's hospital in Aden overwhelmed by influx of patients wounded in intense fighting," Médecins Sans Frontières, August 10, 2019, <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/news/yemen-msfs-hospital-aden-overwhelmed-influx-patients-wounded-intense>.

[29] "Yemen: Significant humanitarian needs following days of fighting in Aden," International Committee of the Red Cross, August 12, 2019, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/Yemen-significant-humanitarian-needs-following-days-fighting-Aden>.

[30] "NRC staff and civilians trapped due to fighting in Aden," Norwegian Refugee Council, August 9, 2019, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2019/august2/nrc-staff-and-civilians-trapped-due-to-fighting-in-aden/>.



Some 200,000 people were left without clean water, **the ICRC said**, adding that access to electricity was also affected.<sup>[31]</sup> **Save the Children noted** that the swift escalation in fighting meant civilians had no time to evacuate or stock up on food or water.<sup>[32]</sup>

Nine fighters were killed and 13 wounded in clashes between Security Belt forces and pro-government troops south of Ataq on August 25, **The Associated Press (AP) reported**.<sup>[33]</sup> UN humanitarian coordinator Lise Grande **said** aid workers had confirmed 13 people killed and 70 wounded during fierce fighting in Aden and Abyan from August 27-29, though full casualty figures were difficult to verify.<sup>[34]</sup> **Médecins Sans Frontières said** it admitted 51 patients to its Aden hospital in a few hours on August 28 after a day of heavy fighting, including 10 who were dead on arrival.<sup>[35]</sup>

Aden's death toll rose further on August 29 as airstrikes by Emirati forces killed at least 25 Yemeni government soldiers and wounded 150 people, a Yemeni government commander **told the New York Times**.<sup>[36]</sup> The Yemeni government's human rights ministry said violations by Security Belt forces intensified in the final days of August, and that at least 300 civilians were wounded or killed **between August 28 and August 30**.<sup>[37]</sup>

An explosion near a Security Belt forces checkpoint **killed three people** on August 30, security officials said.<sup>[38]</sup> The Islamic State group said it had carried out a motorcycle bombing in the Dar Sa'd area in Aden targeting Security Belt forces, and claimed nine were killed and wounded. In response, the STC ordered a nightly curfew and banned the use of motorcycles in Aden, the AP reported.

**Humanitarian agencies** warned that disruptions to operations at Aden's seaport — a site of clashes in August — threatened the import of commercial and humanitarian supplies and could exacerbate the humanitarian crisis across Yemen.<sup>[39]</sup> Aden airport **closed from August 8 to 10**, and flights were suspended again on **August 28**.<sup>[40]</sup>

[31] "Yemen: Significant humanitarian needs following days of fighting in Aden," International Committee of the Red Cross, August 12, 2019, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/Yemen-significant-humanitarian-needs-following-days-fighting-Aden>.

[32] "Yemen: 'People on the ground are terrified,'" Save the Children, August 29, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-people-ground-are-terrified>.

[33] Ahmed al-Haj, "Security officials: Yemeni forces battle separatists near southern, 9 dead," The Associated Press, August 25, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/14c773295d3f46b0baa66e88c0b36785>.

[34] "Tens of people killed and wounded in Aden and Abyan," UN Office of the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, August 29, 2019, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019%20Aug%2029%20-%20HC%20Statement\\_Aden\\_FINAL.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019%20Aug%2029%20-%20HC%20Statement_Aden_FINAL.pdf).

[35] "Yemen: MSF admits 51 wounded casualties within a few hours amid chaos in Aden," Médecins Sans Frontières, August 29, 2019, <https://prezly.msf.org.uk/yemen-msf-admits-51-wounded-casualties-within-a-few-hours-amid-chaos-in-aden>.

[36] Declan Walsh and Saeed al-Batati, "Ally Attacks Ally in Yemen's War Within a War," The New York Times, August 29, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/29/world/middleeast/yemen-saudi-emirates.html>.

[37] Ahmed al-Haj and Jan M. Olsen, "Sweden's FM to tour Mideast to relaunch Yemen talks," The Associated Press, August 30, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/c0135a03e4b6492bbf43378477dd8841>.

[38] Ibid.

[39] "Yemen: 'People on the ground are terrified,'" Save the Children, August 29, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-people-ground-are-terrified>; "NRC staff and civilians trapped due to fighting in Aden," Norwegian Refugee Council, August 9, 2019, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2019/august2/nrc-staff-and-civilians-trapped-due-to-fighting-in-aden/>.

[40] "20 killed in Aden clashes as Yemen's government warns of coup threat," The New Arab, August 9, 2019, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2019/8/9/20-killed-as-yemens-government-warns-of-coup-threat>; "Yemen's Aden airport resumes operations after days of shutdown amid fighting," Xinhua Net, August 11, 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/11/c\\_138301329.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/11/c_138301329.htm); "Yemen: 'People on the ground are terrified,'" Save the Children, August 29, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-people-ground-are-terrified>.

## ***Riyadh Protects Central Bank, Fuel Imports; Abu Dhabi Supports Power Generation***

Although many senior staff vacated Aden following the outbreak of clashes in the city in August, the central bank in Aden remained operational throughout most of the month. It insisted on August 15 that it was functioning normally in a statement **intended** to prevent a run on the Yemeni rial in the exchange market.<sup>[41]</sup>

Saudi Arabia played a pivotal role in securing the withdrawal of Security Belt forces from the vicinity of the central bank building in Aden during the STC takeover, impressing upon both the STC and the Yemeni government that the central bank was not to be interfered with and stationing Saudi troops around the building to enforce this order. This included Saudi armored vehicles and some Saudi special forces soldiers rebuffing the STC-aligned Aden security chief Shalal Ali Shaye'a's attempts to enter the bank, according to a senior Yemeni government security official who spoke with the Sana'a Center.

Riyadh also ensured the bank could carry on implementing the government's fuel and food import mechanisms. Saudi Arabia deposited an estimated 285 million Saudi riyals in the internationally recognized Yemeni government's account at Al Ahli Bank in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, the central bank in Aden announced August 19.<sup>[42]</sup> According to an official from the internationally recognized Yemeni government, the Saudi funds will be used to facilitate the Hadi government's fuel import mechanisms – as stipulated in Decree 75 and Decree 49.<sup>[43]</sup>

Meanwhile, the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) stepped in on August 22 to deliver an estimated 30,000 metric tons of fuel for electricity power generation to Aden, senior energy industry officials told the Sana'a Center. Several Sana'a Center sources, including a fuel broker and a former Yemen Petroleum Company (YPC) official, said the STC had been consulting with billionaire businessman Ahmed al-Essi about providing fuel already scheduled for delivery to Aden Refinery Company (ARC) for electricity power generation.<sup>[44]</sup> Al-Essi, who has held a monopoly over fuel imports via Aden since July 2015, is among Hadi's closest advisors. His market control limits the STC's options in securing other fuel sources.

[41] Central Bank of Yemen, Facebook, August 15, 2019, [https://facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=2413625295593392&id=2340061069616482](https://facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=2413625295593392&id=2340061069616482).

[42] Sana'a Center interview on August 19, 2019; Central Bank of Yemen, Facebook, August 19, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/CentralBankOfYemen/posts/2417409701881618>

[43] Sana'a Center interview on August 19, 2019.

[44] Sana'a Center interviews on August 22, 2019.

## Analysis of August Developments

### *Saudi, Emirati Divisions Laid Bare, Complicating Legal Basis for Intervention*

While divergent aims of coalition partners Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Yemen have been no secret, never have they been laid out quite so visibly as they were in Aden in August.

Rather than an objective in itself, Abu Dhabi's empowerment of the STC during the ongoing conflict was in part a byproduct of a larger Emirati strategy in Yemen. Along with directing anti-Houthi ground forces, the UAE has led a counterterrorism campaign with US support and established influence over much of the southern Yemen coastline. Separatists appeared an acceptable partner in these endeavors — well-organized, inclusive of Salafis who were perceived to be generally obedient, and with a network of tribes and local actors across parts of the south. They also shared a common foe in the Islah party, which the STC considers a subversive northern force and the UAE sees as a local franchise of the Muslim Brotherhood group, which it considers a terrorist organization.

The UAE helped the STC grow to resemble a government-in-waiting, complete with a military force. While Abu Dhabi could exercise some restraint on its local partner, the discord between the STC's agenda and that of the Yemeni government and, supposedly, the coalition backing it, remained unaddressed. Riyadh is now forcefully confronted with this discord: the STC's takeover of Aden and demands for an independent southern state fly in the face of Saudi Arabia's declared objectives for its intervention: to restore President Hadi's rule over all of Yemen.

On the other hand, the UAE military drawdown from Yemen this summer effectively gave the STC a pass to proceed with an offensive Abu Dhabi would otherwise have been compelled to rein in (as it did in [January 2018](#)). This newly established distance allowed Abu Dhabi to temporarily [disassociate](#) itself from the STC assault — even if only as a diplomatic fig leaf. This shakey political cover was blown away when UAE aircraft bombed Saudi-backed forces in Aden; a point driven home by the Yemeni government's call for a response from Riyadh and its request for UN Security Council intervention.

### *Southern Resentment Fueled STC Takeover, but Southern Divisions Limited It*

While the UAE's military drawdown in Yemen and death of Abu al-Yamama were the immediate catalysts for the Aden takeover, the roots of the power grab go much deeper. Opposition to the concentration of power in Sana'a following the 1990 unification of Yemen fueled secessionist sentiment, with a north-south civil war in 1994 and southerners' subsequent disenfranchisement reinforcing these grievances. The central government's violent suppression of protest movements in the south

beginning in 2007 gave birth to the Southern Movement (commonly known as *Hirak*). The umbrella organization encompassing various pro-separatist groups was beset with factionalism, with the only real common denominator being the revival of southern autonomy.

In 2017, Aidarous al-Zubaidi formed the STC after Hadi dismissed him as governor of Aden over his support for the Southern Movement. The STC has since become a state-like entity, boasting what is essentially a UAE-funded paramilitary force that gradually established de facto security control over Aden as well as a would-be southern parliament, the National Assembly. The August events were not the first time the STC has flexed its muscles in Aden; in January 2018, STC-aligned forces took control of the government's headquarters in the interim capital and briefly kept ministers under house arrest. Saudi mediation brought the hostilities to an end but the wheels had been firmly set in motion; since then, it has effectively dominated the city — claiming support for the Hadi government in public statements while simultaneously embarking on an international lobbying offensive for its separatist cause.

Two critical hurdles still in place have impeded the STC project in the south. Firstly, the Hadi government still has international recognition that has formed the basis of the Saudi-led intervention and underpinned all aspects of the UN Security Council's handling of the Yemen crisis since the Houthi takeover of Sana'a. The political force behind this legal bottom line means it cannot simply be ignored, no matter how far it strays from the reality of governance in Yemen. Secondly, and connected to this international recognition, the government has been able to rely on the steadfast backing of coalition leader Saudi Arabia — support that has proved of limited consequence militarily though priceless in its political clout.

Southern Yemen is also far from politically homogenous and beyond its Aden stronghold, the STC failed in August to overcome complex local power dynamics. Competing ideologies and historical cleavages make southern Yemen treacherous for any single actor trying to assert authority.

Among southern Yemen's internal divisions is the regional fault line dating back to the 1986 southern civil war that pitted fighters from Al-Dhalea and Lahj against those from Abyan and Shabwa governorates. President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi, himself a southerner from Abyan, fled to Sana'a after emerging on the losing side in the 1986 conflict. Since becoming president in February 2012, Hadi has looked to shore up and enhance his narrow support base through strategic government and military appointments, including his current interior minister, Ahmed al-Maysari, a former governor from Abyan who led — and lost — the August battles in Aden.

These historical divisions manifested in late August in the form of clashes in Shabwa, Abyan and Aden. While the Shabwa Elite Forces, which are backed by the UAE and viewed as STC-aligned, clashed with government forces inside Shabwa in mid-August, other government troops in Abyan mobilized to cut off potential STC-aligned reinforcements being sent from Al-Dhalea and from Yafea in Lahj governorate. Government forces then seized control in Shabwa and began counter-operations in Abyan. The government's Abyani contingent gained ground, even managing to advance on Aden in late August before being pushed back.



Among southerners outside Aden, there is an element of support for the STC in Shabwa governorate in the form of the UAE-backed Shabwa Elite Forces. However, the UAE's failure to invest in the tribal dynamics in Shabwa ultimately weakened its position. There and in neighboring Hadramawt governorate, mistrust of any central authority or entity with aspirations to govern, such as the STC, isn't unusual given the revenues that could be generated by exploiting the two governorates' crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) resources as well as by controlling their sea ports. LNG exports via Belhaf in Shabwa have been suspended since the war escalated in March 2015. Talks involving Yemeni government and oil industry officials about exporting Marib crude via Shabwa, via the pipeline to Nashayama export terminal, have been stalled by security disagreements.<sup>[45]</sup>

Shabwa borders Marib governorate and relies on access to the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and LNG produced in Marib, where the STC's ardent opponent, the Yemeni Congregation for Reform, or *Islah* party, has a strong base. After initially pushing government troops out of Aden, the STC insisted its grievances rest not with the Hadi government but with *Islah*,<sup>[46]</sup> which the STC and its Emirati backers view as their biggest rival.

Cultural, linguistic and tribal similarities in Shabwa and Marib also connect the people of these governorates far more closely to each other than to the Aden-based STC. Hadramis, historically, have exhibited strong desires to tread their own path, distancing themselves from powerbrokers in Sana'a and Aden. Losing Shabwa only reinforces the image of the STC as solely an Aden-Dhalea-Lahj organization, a blow to its claim of being the exclusive representative of all southern Yemen.

Southern Yemen's eastern-most governorate, Al-Mahra, has pushed back against UAE, Saudi and STC attempts since 2015 to exercise control or gain influence in its isolated corner of the south, which is wary of central authority but generally accepts the Hadi government.<sup>[47]</sup> They've largely succeeded thus far against the STC and Emiratis, though Saudi Arabia has established almost two dozen military facilities in the governorate since 2017.<sup>[48]</sup> Mahris appeared ready to dig in once again, circulating a call in late August warning that the STC was on its way to Al-Mahra and urging people to "mobilize and unite to repel all who invade."<sup>[49]</sup>

Another potential obstacle rests with the Salafi militiamen of the Security Belt forces and the Giants Brigades, many of whom are from Yafea and Radfan districts in Lahj governorate. At the moment, they are driven by their common desire to eliminate the Houthis, but there is a fault line between Salafis of each militia. Those aligned with Security Belt forces are viewed as loyal to the STC and their patron, the UAE, and tend to support southern secession. Salafis with the Giants Brigades are generally considered loyal to President Hadi, even though the UAE pays the salaries of Giants Brigade fighters in Red Sea Coast area operations against the Houthis. Exemplifying this division, in **February 2017** and **January 2018**, during previous cycles of conflict between UAE-backed forces and Hadi's presidential guards, Giants Brigade fighters have threatened to come to Hadi's aid.

[45] Sana'a Center confidential interview with a Yemen LNG official, August 25, 2019.

[46] "The Transitional Council Issues An Important Statement on the Government Attacks on Unarmed Citizens," Southern Transitional Council, August 7, 2019, <https://en.stcaden.com/news/8765>.

[47] Yahya al-Sewari, "Yemen's Al-Mahra: From Isolation to the Eye of a Geopolitical Storm," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, July 5, 2019, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/7606>.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Dr. Elisabeth Kendall, Twitter post, August 24, 2019, [https://twitter.com/Dr\\_E\\_Kendall/status/1165186216687558657](https://twitter.com/Dr_E_Kendall/status/1165186216687558657).

## Related International Developments

### *Yemen Seeks UN Security Council Intervention in the South*

On August 29, the internationally recognized Yemeni government **called for** a meeting of the UN Security Council (UNSC) to discuss Emirati airstrikes against government troops in southern Yemen. President Hadi, in a statement read on his behalf on state TV, **accused** the UAE of conducting an “aerial bombardment against our armed forces.” He also demanded that Saudi Arabia intervene to halt the UAE’s “blatant interference” in southern Yemen.<sup>[50]</sup>

A diplomatic source told the Sana’a Center on August 31 that the Hadi government had not “explicitly” requested a meeting of the UNSC. Rather, the message sent to the council asked it to “intervene” following the most recent developments in southern Yemen. The source also said Russia, which took over the Security Council presidency at the start of September, may organize a meeting of the body in the coming days.

Earlier in the month, during an August 20 UNSC briefing on Yemen, the internationally recognized Yemeni government’s representative at the UN, Abdullah Ali Fadhel al-Saadi, **said** the STC takeover of Aden would not have taken place “had it not been for the full support of the United Arab Emirates in the planning, implementation and financing of this rebellion.”<sup>[51]</sup> In response, **the UAE mission** to the United Nations said Abu Dhabi “categorically rejects” the accusations.<sup>[52]</sup>

### *Saudi-UAE Try to Present a Unified Front*

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the closest of Gulf Arab allies over the years, tried to present a unified front after the initial STC takeover in Aden. Saudi King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman **met** August 12 with Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, in Mecca. The leaders called jointly for the Yemeni factions each supports to resolve their differences through dialogue and finding common ground.<sup>[53]</sup> Sheikh Mohammed said Saudi Arabia and the UAE would “**adamantly confront**” any powers that threaten regional security.<sup>[54]</sup> Despite the public unity, Reuters news agency reported on August 28 that King Salman had taken the **unusual step** of expressing his “extreme irritation” during the Mecca meeting.<sup>[55]</sup>

[50] Text of President Hadi’s statement carried by Al-Mawqea Post, August 29, 2019, <https://almawqea.net/news/43213>.

[51] Text of Al-Saadi’s statement to the UN Security Council, Saba Net, August 20, 2019, <https://www.sabanew.net/viewstory/52972>.

[52] Twitter post on the official UAE Mission to UN site, August 20, 2019, <https://twitter.com/UAEMissionToUN/status/1163985503085125633>.

[53] “Saudi Arabia, UAE urge Yemenis to resolve differences through dialogue,” Arab News, 12 August, 2019, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1539106/saudi-arabia>.

[54] Mohammed Mukhashef and Fawaz Salman, “UAE plays down Saudi rift after separatists take Yemeni city,” Reuters, August 12, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/uae-plays-down-saudi-rift-after-separatists-take-yemeni-city-idUSKCN1V20MW>.

[55] “UAE loosens Saudi alliance to push peacemaker image,” Reuters, August 28, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-emirates-diplomacy/uae-loosens-saudi-alliance-to-push-peacemaker-image-idUSKCN1V11WA>.

## *UN Envoy Warns of Fragmentation, Condemns STC Moves in Southern Yemen*

During the briefing to the UNSC on August 20, UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths **denounced** moves by the STC to take control of state institutions by force and warned that the fragmentation of Yemen was becoming a more pressing threat.<sup>[56]</sup> This followed a **statement** by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres earlier in the month calling on both sides to cease hostilities and engage in dialogue to resolve their differences.<sup>[57]</sup> Griffiths later met with President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi on August 27 in Riyadh and expressed **support** for the internationally recognized government's efforts to "restore stability in the south."<sup>[58]</sup>

Developments in southern Yemen, particularly Aden, present an additional set of challenges to UN-peace efforts in the country. Previous UN peace initiatives have focused on mediating between the Houthi movement and the internationally recognized government, along with its backers in the coalition, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. However, the recent conflict between the STC and the Yemeni government could see the formulation of a new peace framework that places additional emphasis on the southern issue.

The UN envoy has previously maintained that any discussions regarding the southern issue should be addressed after a negotiated settlement has been reached to end the conflict. After several meetings with STC leaders last year, Griffiths' office said in August 2018 that the movement had affirmed its "**readiness to participate positively in the political process**."<sup>[59]</sup> However, during direct consultations between the Houthi movement and the internationally recognized government in Sweden at the end of 2018, the **STC said** its exclusion and that of the southern issue from the peace talks would perpetuate the cycle of conflict in the country.<sup>[60]</sup>

In reaction to the special envoy's briefing on developments in southern Yemen, member states on the UNSC showed no indication of backing an independent South Yemen at this time, calling on all parties to maintain Yemen's territorial integrity in a **presidential statement** adopted August 29.<sup>[61]</sup> Several council members also **expressed** worries that the recent violence could result in a humanitarian crisis in Aden and southern Yemen more broadly, and the further deterioration of state institutions.<sup>[62]</sup>

[56] "Briefing of the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General For Yemen to the Open Session of the Security Council," United Nations, August 20, 2019, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/briefing-special-envoy-united-nations-secretary-general-yemen-open-session-security-council>.

[57] "Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Yemen," United Nations Secretary-General, August 9, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2019-08-09/statement-attributable-the-spokesman-for-the-secretary-general-yemen>.

[58] Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen Twitter Account, August 27, 2019, [https://twitter.com/OSE\\_Yemen/status/1166353578505703426](https://twitter.com/OSE_Yemen/status/1166353578505703426).

[59] "UN Envoy meets Southern Transitional Council on Resumption of Political Process," Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, August 30, 2018, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/un-envoy-meets-southern-transitional-council-resumption-political-process>.

[60] "Urgent: Important statement from the Transitional Council regarding the negotiations of Sweden [عاجل: بيان هام: أمن المجلس الانتقالي بخصوص مفاوضات السويد]," Yemen Akhbar, December 7, 2018, <https://www.yemenakhbar.com/1755631>

[61] "Statement by the President of the Security Council," United Nations Security Council, August 29, 2019, <https://undocs.org/S/PRST/2019/9>.

[62] "Briefing Security Council, Special Envoy warns new clashes in Yemen risk expanding humanitarian crisis, violence, stresses need to implement Stockholm Agreement," August 20, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13920.doc.htm>.

## ***Iran Calls for Unified Yemen, Denounces Saudi-UAE ‘Plots’ to Divide***

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei responded August 13 to events in southern Yemen, denouncing what he called Saudi and UAE “plots” to divide the country and endorsing a “unified, coherent Yemen with sovereign integrity.”

During a Tehran meeting with a Houthi delegation, the Iranian leader called for domestic dialogue to protect Yemen’s territorial integrity given the country’s religious and ethnic diversity, in **remarks carried by state-run media** (for more information on the Houthi delegation’s meetings in Iran, see: **Tehran Accepts Houthi Ambassador**).<sup>[63]</sup>

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[63] “Supreme Leader Calls on Yemen’s Ansarullah to stand strong vis-a-vis Saudi-UAE plots,” IRNA, August 13, 2019, <https://en.irna.ir/news/83436303/Supreme-Leader-Calls-on-Yemen-s-Ansarullah-to-stand-strong-vis-a-vis>.



# Other Developments in Yemen

## Human Rights Developments

### *Saudi Airstrikes on Dhamar Prison Kill More than 120 people*

More than 120 people were killed on September 1 as the Saudi-led coalition bombed a Houthi-run prison facility in Dhamar, 100 kilometers south of Sana'a. The detention center held 170 prisoners; the **International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC)** said 40 wounded prisoners were being treated and the rest were presumed dead.<sup>[64]</sup> Red Crescent volunteers were working to retrieve bodies from the rubble, a task that was expected to take several days, the ICRC said September 1. By September 3, 123 bodies had been pulled from the rubble, **medics said**.<sup>[65]</sup>

The detainees were troops loyal to the Yemeni government, according to the Houthis; locals told The Associated Press (AP) that their family members were imprisoned there for criticizing the Houthis. The Houthis said the Red Cross and the coalition were aware the site was a prison; **the ICRC said** its teams had previously visited the facility.<sup>[66]</sup>

The Saudi-led coalition **claimed the facility** was used to store weapons.<sup>[67]</sup> Coalition spokesperson **Turki al-Maliki said** the site was a "legitimate military target" and that the coalition had not been informed there were prisoners there.<sup>[68]</sup> The site was not on a no-strike list coordinated by the UN or ICRC, he said.

UN Special Envoy **Martin Griffiths called** on the coalition to investigate the attack.<sup>[69]</sup> UN Humanitarian Coordinator **Lise Grande said** humanitarian partners were diverting medical supplies from the cholera response to hospitals in Dhamar.<sup>[70]</sup>

[64] "Yemen: Scenes of devastation as every single detainee either killed or injured in attack," International Committee of the Red Cross, September 1, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-scenes-devastation-every-single-detainee-either-killed-or-injured-attack>.

[65] "123 bodies pulled from rubble at Yemen's Dhamar prison," Anadolu Agency, September 3, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/123-bodies-pulled-from-rubble-at-yemens-dhamar-prison/1571837>.

[66] "Yemen: Scenes of devastation as every single detainee either killed or injured in attack," International Committee of the Red Cross, September 1, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-scenes-devastation-every-single-detainee-either-killed-or-injured-attack>.

[67] "Saudi-led airstrikes kill at least 100 in rebel-run prison," Voice of America News, September 1, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/saudi-led-airstrikes-kill-least-100-rebel-run-prison>.

[68] Ahmed al-Haj and Samy Magdy, "Saudi-led airstrikes on Yemen rebel-run prison kill over 100," The Associated Press, September 2, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/c0135a03e4b6492bbf43378477dd8841>.

[69] "Mass casualties reported following air strikes in Dhamar Governorate," The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen and the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, September 1, 2019, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Draft%20joint%20templates%20SE\\_HC\\_1%20September%202019.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Draft%20joint%20templates%20SE_HC_1%20September%202019.pdf).

[70] Ibid.

Repeated strikes on the site had made it difficult for first responders to reach the area and search for survivors, Grande said.

The multi-storey building had been a community college before the Houthis converted it into a detention center.

### *In Photos: Aftermath of the Dhamar Prison Bombing*



*Bulldozers from the Dhamar Public Works Office clear rubble as Red Crescent volunteers work to retrieve bodies from the ruins of the Dhamar detention center on September 3, 2019. The Saudi-led coalition bombed the facility on September 1, 2019 // Photo credit: Saqr Abu Hassan.*



*Two men ask a soldier about a missing relative who was imprisoned in Dhamar detention center at the time of the bombing, on September 3, 2019 // Photo credit: Saqr Abu Hassan.*





*A group of Red Crescent volunteers and a soldier search the rubble for bodies on September 3, 2019 // Photo credit: Saqr Abu Hassan.*



*A group of Red Crescent volunteers and a soldier search the rubble for bodies on September 3, 2019 // Photo credit: Saqr Abu Hassan.*





*A group of Red Crescent volunteers and a soldier search the rubble for bodies on September 3, 2019 // Photo credit: Saqr Abu Hassan.*

## ***UN Experts Identify Suspected War Criminals in Yemen***

Parties to the conflict in Yemen may have committed substantial and wide-ranging human rights violations and war crimes during the past year, UN-appointed experts said [in a report](#) published September 3.

The Group of Eminent Experts is mandated by the UN Human Rights Council to investigate alleged human rights abuses and violations of international law in Yemen. The experts said they had submitted a confidential list of individuals who may be responsible for international crimes to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, recommending that they should be investigated with a view to prosecution.

The experts investigated a number of airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition and concluded that some attacks may have violated the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. For these attacks, as well as torture, rape and child recruitment, individuals from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Yemeni government may be responsible for war crimes, the experts concluded. Individuals from the armed Houthi movement could be responsible for war crimes including torture, outrages upon personal dignity and the recruitment of child soldiers, the experts said. France, Iran, the UK and the US could be held responsible for aiding or assisting in the commission of violations of international law, the experts noted.

In the south, UAE-backed Security Belt and Shabwa Elite Forces were responsible for enforced disappearances, torture, sexual violence and solitary confinement in prisons



and unofficial detention sites for political opponents, including the Assab detention facility in Eritrea, the report said. The experts documented multiple cases of sexual violence by Yemeni government forces, Emirati personnel and UAE-backed militias. UAE personnel at a coalition facility in Al-Burayqah, Aden, regularly used sexual violence including anal and oral rape and gang rape against detainees in 2018-2019, the experts found. The experts also verified dozens of cases of sexual violence by Security Belt forces and the Yemeni army between 2016 and 2019. At an unofficial detention center run by the Yemeni army and Saudi Arabia in Sayoun, Hadramawt governorate, the group documented cases of electrocution, mock executions and forced nudity.

The experts found reasonable grounds to believe that Security Belt forces had committed multiple rapes, including of migrants and refugees, in Aden. They were told that Security Belt forces entered homes at night and raped women, and also picked women from the streets to rape them. They also found that the 35th Armored Brigade had committed multiple rapes in Taiz, including gage rapes and abuses in front of family members.

The experts documented multiple cases of sexual violence against men, women and a teenage boy in Houthi detention; detainees described assaults on genitals, forced nudity and threats of rape. Houthi fighters also kidnapped and detained women and girls for up to eight months in order to blackmail relatives, the experts said.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Yemeni government said they would not cooperate with the experts or support the group's work; consequently, the experts were not able to visit Yemen in 2019. Some parties deliberately tried to obstruct the experts' work, they said. Houthi authorities agreed in writing to allow the experts to visit, but the visit was not possible due to lack of cooperation by the Yemeni government and coalition members.

## ***Up to 32,000 Premature Deaths Due to Sana'a Airport Closure***

As many as 32,000 people may have died prematurely due to restrictions imposed on Yemen's airspace by the Saudi-led coalition for the last three years, according to an August report by [the Norwegian Refugee Council and CARE](https://www.nrc.no/news/2019/august2/airport-closure-amounts-to-death-sentence-for-thousands-of-sick-yemenis/).<sup>[71]</sup> Sana'a International Airport has been closed to commercial flights since August 9, 2016, preventing sick civilians from seeking life-saving treatment abroad and restricting the delivery of medicine.

[71] "Airport closure amounts to death sentence for thousands of sick Yemenis," Norwegian Refugee Council, August 5, 2019, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2019/august2/airport-closure-amounts-to-death-sentence-for-thousands-of-sick-yemenis/>.

## *Airstrike in Hajjah Kills 12*

On August 11, strikes on a house in Mustaba district in Hajjah governorate killed 12 people, including women and six children, and wounded 16, [the UN humanitarian coordinator said](#).<sup>[72]</sup> The [Houthi-run health ministry claimed](#) the house was hit by an airstrike by the Saudi-led coalition and said 11 people were killed.<sup>[73]</sup>

## **Military and Security Developments**

### *AQAP, IS Strikes Intensify, Focus on UAE-backed Militias*

After a quiet July that mostly featured a handful of sniper attacks and ambushes directed at one another, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State group (IS) each launched a major attack targeting the Security Belt forces at the beginning of August. The attacks, one in Aden and one in Abyan, took place within 24 hours on August 1 and 2.

In the first attack, a suicide bomber – [identified as Aqil al-Muhajir](#)<sup>[74]</sup> – struck a police station in Aden’s Sheikh Othman district, [killing 13](#).<sup>[75]</sup> During the early morning hours of August 2, [AQAP then attacked and overran a Security Belt base](#) in the Al-Mahfad region of Abyan.<sup>[76]</sup> This second attack killed at least 19 soldiers and, according to one account, AQAP fighters remained inside the base for [several hours](#) before they were pushed out.<sup>[77]</sup>

Both of these attacks took place within a day of the [Houthi missile strike](#) on the Al-Jala Military base in Aden, which was the catalyst for clashes between the STC and military units loyal to Hadi’s government that continued throughout the rest of the month. As that fighting has intensified, so too has the number of AQAP and IS attacks in Yemen. Each has struck at the same set of four targets: the Houthis, UAE-backed forces, Hadi-aligned forces, and each other. However, unlike in past months when AQAP focused most of its energy on striking IS, throughout August it attacked UAE-backed proxy forces – like the Security Belt forces and Shabwa Elite Forces – more than any other target. In June, [AQAP released a statement](#) warning individuals in

[72] “Women and children killed and wounded by strikes in Hajjah,” UN Office of the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, August 12, 2019, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HC%20Statement\\_Sanaa\\_12\\_August\\_FINAL.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HC%20Statement_Sanaa_12_August_FINAL.pdf).

[73] Ahmed Al-Haj and Samy Magdy, “UAE-backed separatists pull back after seizing Yemen’s Aden,” The Associated Press, August 11, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/db7e4b818f8e48a1926d5266314204e7>.

[74] “Tens Killed and Wounded From the Security Belt Forces in a Martyrdom Attack,” Al-Naba’, ISIS newsletter, No. 194, [https://jihadology.net/wp-content/uploads/\\_pda/2019/08/The-Islamic-State-al-Naba%CC%84%E2%80%9999-Newsletter-194.pdf](https://jihadology.net/wp-content/uploads/_pda/2019/08/The-Islamic-State-al-Naba%CC%84%E2%80%9999-Newsletter-194.pdf).

[75] “ISIS claims the attack on Police State in Sheikh Othman in Aden and Announces the Name of the bomber,” Al-Masdar Online, August 2, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/170257>.

[76] “Details of the al-Mahfad Raid,” Al-Masdar Online, August 3, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/170288>.

[77] “Al-Qaeda attacks Yemeni army base in Abyan,” The National, August 2, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/al-Qaeda-attacks-yemeni-army-base-in-abyan-1.893767>.

Shabwa to stay away from bases affiliated with the Shabwa Elite Forces, as AQAP considered those bases to be legitimate targets.<sup>[78]</sup>

For its part, IS released photographs of what it claimed were mortar strikes against Houthi positions in Al-Bayda. It also claimed multiple attacks – some of which AQAP disputed – against its jihadi rival in a war that is now entering its second year. But, perhaps most notably, after a long period of silence IS once again carried out multiple assassinations, which it filmed and photographed, in Aden. For example, on August 16, an **IS militant shot and killed** a member of the Counter Terrorism Forces in Aden;<sup>[79]</sup> a similar assassination was carried out **the week before**.<sup>[80]</sup> IS claimed another **suicide attack in Aden on August 30**,<sup>[81]</sup> during the fighting between the STC and Hadi-aligned forces.

### *Fighting Between Islah-affiliated and UAE-backed Forces in Taiz*

Four days of **fighting** between the Fourth Infantry Brigade and 35th Armored Brigade in Al-Turbah, Taiz, threatened an uneasy truce between rival anti-Houthi forces in the governorate, killed 23 people and displaced several families.<sup>[82]</sup> Tensions began to grow on August 13, when Brig. Gen. Mansour al-Akhali, Taiz's Islah-aligned police chief, announced the appointment of Col. Abdel Karim Qasim al-Aliani as the new head of police in Al-Shamaitin district, replacing Col. Abdel-Karim al-Sami. Taiz's southern Al-Shamaitin district is dominated by the 35th Armored Brigade – officially a government military unit but one whose ranks are largely populated by Salafi fighters loyal to UAE-backed warlord and local Islah rival Abu al-Abbas. The announcement was met with opposition from the 35th Armored Brigade and rejected by Al-Sami.

Al-Akhali attempted to implement his decision by force on August 15, but when his forces were met with resistance, violent clashes broke out. Fighting then escalated and spread beyond Al-Turbah city, with the fiercest clashes occurring near a checkpoint manned by Abu al-Abbas' forces in the Al-Berain area, pulling in the Islah-aligned Fourth Infantry Brigade and the 35th Armored Brigade. Ten members of the Abu al-Abbas brigades and 12 from the security forces were killed, according to sources from each side. About 40 fighters were injured in total, they said. One civilian was also killed, according to sources working with families displaced in the area.

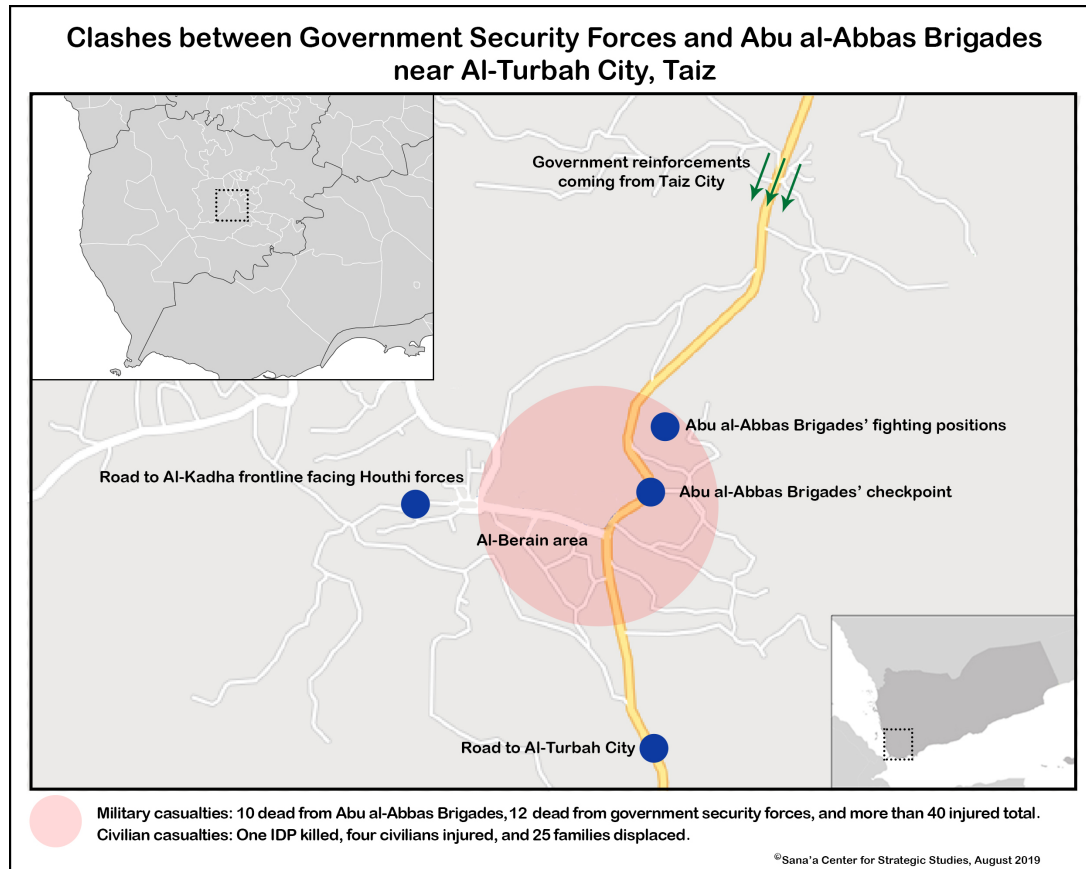
[78] Statement on Shabwa, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, June 4, 2019, [https://jihadology.net/wp-content/uploads/\\_pda/2019/06/al-Qa%CC%84%E2%80%99idah-in-the-Arabian-Peninsula-%E2%80%9CStatement%E2%80%9D2.pdf](https://jihadology.net/wp-content/uploads/_pda/2019/06/al-Qa%CC%84%E2%80%99idah-in-the-Arabian-Peninsula-%E2%80%9CStatement%E2%80%9D2.pdf).

[79] "A Soldier in the Counter Terrorism Forces Assassinated in Aden..." Al-Masdar Online, August 16, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/170681>.

[80] "Second Assassination in Aden, ISIS Claims the Operation," 26th of September, August 16, 2019, [https://26sep.net/news\\_details.php?lang=arabic&sid=161010](https://26sep.net/news_details.php?lang=arabic&sid=161010).

[81] "Islamic State Claims Suicide Attack on Separatist Fighters in Yemen's Aden: Amaq," Reuters, August 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2019/08/30/world/middleeast/30reuters-yemen-security-islamicstate.html?searchResultPosition>.

[82] "Taiz .. Clashes between security forces and insurgents in the city of soil," Al-Masdar Online, August 15, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/170669>.



Pro-Islah media **said** the fighting was the result of an attack on the police headquarters in Al-Turbah that constituted a rebellion against a decision by the local government.<sup>[83]</sup> Taiz police said that its decision to replace Al-Sami was a routine security rotation. The Abu al-Abbas Brigades **said** it was pro-Islah fighters that launched an attack as part of what they call an ongoing campaign to displace members of the group.<sup>[84]</sup> On August 18, Interior Minister Ahmed al-Maysari **named** Col. Mohammed Abdo Moqbel al-Alimi head of police in Al-Shamaitin, as a mediation committee headed by Governor Nabil Shamsan explored options for security control in the southeast to avoid future escalations.<sup>[85]</sup>

Though both Islah and Abu al-Abbas are nominally aligned with the internationally recognized government and are simultaneously fighting Houthi forces on Taiz's frontlines, their forces have frequently come to blows. Following the STC's push in the south, consolidating and extending its control over Taiz will appear evermore urgent for Islah, which counts the central governorate as one of its two remaining power bases, along with Marib.

Moreover, with the governorate split between Houthi and government control, access to Taiz has been heavily restricted throughout the conflict, resulting in high levels of

[83] "Al-Samai leads a rebellion against "legitimacy" in Taiz, attacks state institutions, police vows to reveal details of confrontations," Marib Press, August 15, 2019. [https://marebpress.net/news\\_details.php?sid=154257](https://marebpress.net/news_details.php?sid=154257).

[84] Abu Abbas Facebook Page ["Eastern Front of the Popular Resistance "Taiz" – Abu Abbas Front"], August 16, 2019, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=2304383003007829&id=808611169251694](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2304383003007829&id=808611169251694).

[85] "Interior Minister appoints Abdo Moqbel al-Alimi as head of the Shamaitin police in Taiz," Al-Masdar Online, August 18, 2019. <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/170768>.



humanitarian need. The only remaining open road connecting Aden and Taiz runs through Al-Turbah, with Islah-Abu al-Abbas fighting in this area further threatening this lifeline.

## ***Houthi Forces Shoot Down US Drone, Attack Saudi Gas Facilities Near UAE Border***

The Houthis continued to showcase their growing missile and drone capabilities in August, claiming to down a US military drone in Yemeni airspace along with an attack on a natural gas facility in eastern Saudi Arabia.

Houthi forces **claimed** on August 17 to have launched 10 drones at targets in Shaybah oil field, eastern Saudi Arabia.<sup>[86]</sup> The state-owned energy firm Saudi Aramco **said** that a processing unit at a natural gas liquids (NGL) facility was hit in the attack, causing a fire that resulted in minor damage.<sup>[87]</sup> Saudi Aramco added that there was no interruption to the kingdom's oil production. While Houthi forces regularly target locations in southwestern Saudi Arabia, this attack took place some 1,500 kilometers from Houthi-controlled territory in the east of the country. Shaybah oil field is also located within 10 kilometers of the Saudi-Emirati border — lending some veracity to the Houthis' oft-repeated claims that the UAE is within range of its weapons.

Houthi forces also **claimed** to have downed a US MQ-9 Reaper drone above Dhamar governorate on August 20, using what they call the "Fatir 1" missile defense system.<sup>[88]</sup> United States Central Command (CENTCOM) **said** an investigation was underway, adding that the reported attack took place in "authorized airspace" and citing what it called the threat from "Iran's provocative actions and support to proxy forces."<sup>[89]</sup> The Houthis claim to have been using the Fatir 1 air defense system since 2017 and said that the same technology was used in June to bring down a US drone in Hudaydah governorate.

Houthi forces **claimed** to have launched a successful drone attack on a military target in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on August 26.<sup>[90]</sup> The Saudi-led coalition **denied** the claim, calling it "fake and deceptive."<sup>[91]</sup> Meanwhile, in the kingdom's southwestern border governorates, now routine cross-border attacks continued throughout the month, with claims of strikes on Najran, Abha and Jizan airports, and King Khaled Air Base.<sup>[92]</sup>

[86] "In an operation that is the largest of its kind .. The Air Force targeting a field and an oil refinery on the Saudi-UAE border," Al-Masirah, August 17, 2019. [https://www.almasirah.net/details.php?es\\_id=43704&cat\\_id=3](https://www.almasirah.net/details.php?es_id=43704&cat_id=3).

[87] "Shaybah NGL Facility Incident," Saudi Aramco Press Release, August 17, 2019. <https://www.saudiaramco.com/en/news-media/news/2019/shaybah-ngl-facility-incident>.

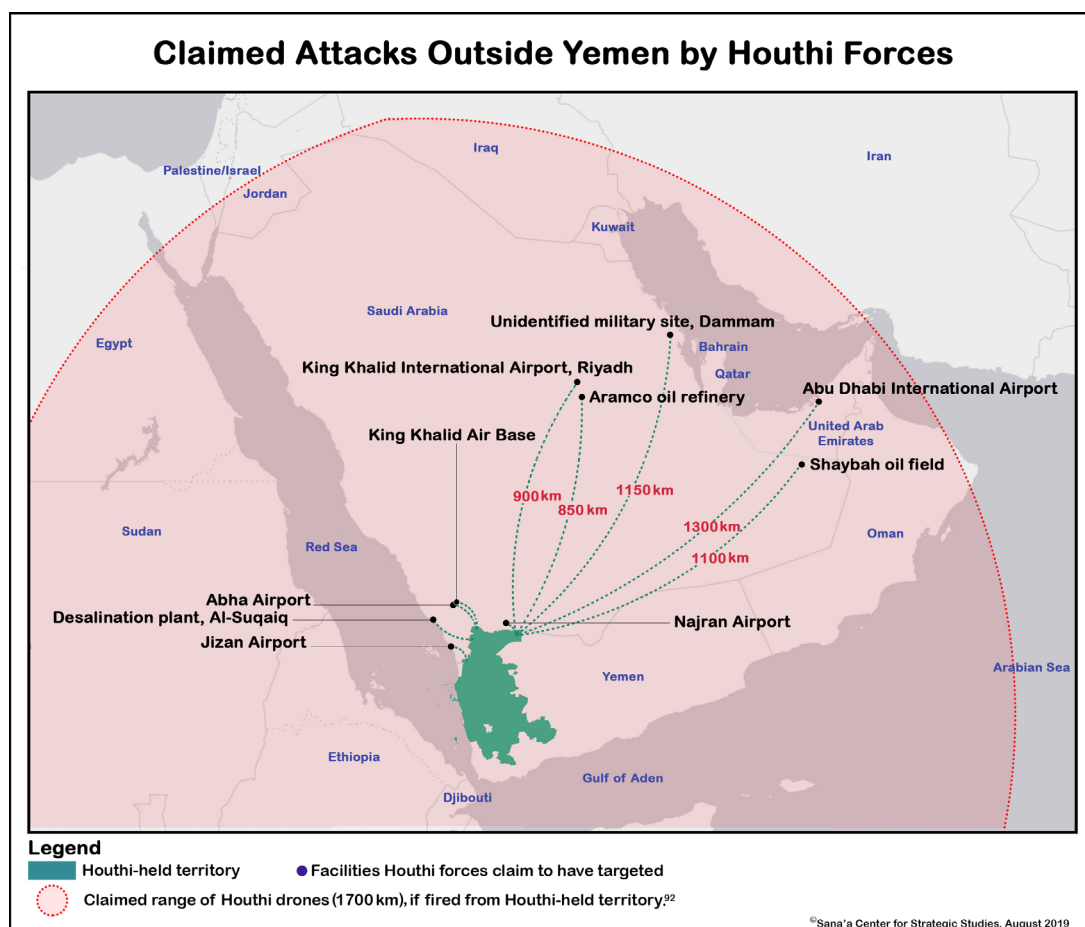
[88] "Specifications and characteristics of the aircraft MQ9 dropped by air defenses in the atmosphere of Dhamar province," Al-Masirah, August 21, 2019. [https://almasirah.net/details.php?es\\_id=43844&cat\\_id=3](https://almasirah.net/details.php?es_id=43844&cat_id=3).

[89] "CENTCOM investigates reports of Houthi-claimed attack on UAS," United States Central Command Press Release, August 21, 2019, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/STATEMENTS/Statements-View/Article/1939864/centcom-investigates-reports-of-houthi-claimed-attack-on-uas/>.

[90] AlMasirah, Twitter Post, August 26, 2019, 1:32pm. <https://twitter.com/MasirahTV/status/1165934920109350912>.

[91] "Saudi-led coalition acts to stabilize south Yemen as allies face off," Reuters, August 26, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-yemen-uae-coalition/saudi-led-coalition-acts-to-stabilize-south-yemen-as-allies-face-off-idUSKCN1VG028>.

[92] "A Spokesman For The Armed Forces Reviews In A Press Briefing New Details About The Yemeni Military



## Political Developments

### *Brother of Houthi Leader Killed in Yemen*

On August 9, the Houthi interior ministry **announced** the death of Ibrahim Badreddine al-Houthi, brother of Houthi leader Abdelmalik al-Houthi. The details and circumstances around his death were unclear as of this writing, with competing narratives emerging since the announcement.<sup>[93]</sup>

The Houthi interior ministry **said** Ibrahim al-Houthi was assassinated by the “US-Israeli-Saudi aggression,” without providing further details, adding that it would pursue those responsible. The coalition said Al-Houthi was killed in Sana’a as a result of internal disputes between factions within the Houthi leadership.<sup>[94]</sup>

A senior security source within the Houthi authority in Sana’a dismissed the idea of a

Industries,” Ansar Allah official website, July 9, 2019, <https://www.ansarollah.com/archives/262426>.

[93] “Ministry of Interior mourns martyr Ibrahim Badr al-Din al-Houthi,” Al-Masrah, August 9, 2019, [https://www.almasarah.net/details.php?es\\_id=43473&cat\\_id=3](https://www.almasarah.net/details.php?es_id=43473&cat_id=3).

[94] “Saudi-led coalition says infighting killed senior Houthi official,” Reuters, August 11, 2019, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-yemen-security-houthi/saudi-led-coalition-says-infighting-killed-senior-houthi-official-idUKKCN1V10KT>.

coalition operation or an internal dispute. Rather, Ibrahim al-Houthi was targeted in a set-up, being lured to an apartment in the Haddha district along with his brother-in-law, who also was killed, the security source told the Sana'a Center on condition of anonymity. The source suggested money was part of the motive for the killing, but did not elaborate or confirm any suspects.

Ibrahim al-Houthi was not as prominent a figure in the Houthi movement as his brothers, having no official military or political position. He occupied an envoy-type role, brokering agreements and supervising mediation in Houthi-held territory.

Security was ramped up in Sana'a following Al-Houthi's death, including rigorous searches of vehicles at new checkpoints across the city, according to witnesses in Sana'a who spoke with the Sana'a Center. Privately-owned Yemeni outlet Al-Masdar **said** that a wave of arbitrary arrests took place in Haifan, southern Taiz, in relation to the assassination.<sup>[95]</sup>

### ***Houthis Merge Intelligence Agencies, Appoint New Leadership***

In a further consolidation of power, Houthi authorities issued a decree **merging** Yemen's two top intelligence agencies and appointing new leadership for the new body, Al-Masdar reported September 2. The move dissolved the National Security Agency and the Political Security Agency. Two senior Houthi security officials were appointed to run the new Security and Intelligence Agency;<sup>[96]</sup> Abdul Hakim al-Khaiwani is the new director and Abdul Qader al-Shami was appointed deputy directory.

### ***Official Eid al-Ghadir Celebrations Take Place in Sana'a***

Official celebrations were **held** in Sana'a on August 19 for Eid al-Ghadir, a major religious holiday for Shia Muslims.<sup>[97]</sup> Commemorations this year were distinctive due to the announcement of an official public holiday by the Houthi authorities for the first time. Sources working in Houthi-run institutions told the Sana'a Center that public sector staff were required to attend the rallies in the capital, which drew thousands of people. Leader Abdelmalik al-Houthi made a **speech** to mark the occasion, combining religious oratory with political rhetoric that took aim at Saudi Arabia.<sup>[98]</sup> Eid al-Ghadir celebrations were not official celebrations in Yemen before the Houthi takeover, though limited private commemorations were held in northern areas of Yemen.

[95] "Houthis kidnap civilians on charges of being related to a person accused of involvement in the killing of the brother of the leader of the group," Al-Masdar Online, August 19, 2019. <https://almasdaronline.info/articles/170809>.

[96] "The Houthis are creating a new intelligence service as an alternative to the National Security and Political Security," Al-Masdar Online, September 2, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/171223>.

[97] "Mass Rallies Celebrating Eid al-Ghadir in Sana'a," Al-Masirah, August 19, 2019. [https://english.almasirah.net/details.php?es\\_id=8353&cat\\_id=1](https://english.almasirah.net/details.php?es_id=8353&cat_id=1).

[98] "The text of the speech of Mr. Abdul-Malik Badreddine al-Houthi in memory of Eid al -Ghadir," 26 September Net, August 29, 2019. [http://www.26sep.net/news\\_details.php?sid=140879](http://www.26sep.net/news_details.php?sid=140879).

## Economic Developments

### *Houthis Appoint New Governor for Central Bank in Sana'a, Finance Minister*

Houthi authorities shook up their top financial posts, appointing Rashid Aboud Sharian Abu Lahom as **the new governor of the central bank in Sana'a** on August 25, in a move that could further erode confidence in Yemen's banking sector. Abu Lahom, who replaces Mohammed al-Sayani, had been serving since February as the Houthis' finance minister. On September 2, Houthi authorities **appointed** Sharafuddin Ali Hussain al-Kohlani to replace Abu Lahom as finance minister.<sup>[99]</sup>

Abu Lahom is a former lecturer at Ibb University with no banking background who, according to a financial sector official familiar with his career, has been politically active at various times over the years with the Islah party, the General People's Congress party of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and ultimately with the Houthis.

Al-Sayani, who **was moved** to the essentially symbolic position of an advisor to the Supreme Political Council (SPC),<sup>[100]</sup> had operated as the de facto governor of the central bank in Sana'a following Hadi's decision to **transfer the Central Bank of Yemen headquarters** from Sana'a to Aden in September 2016 and to remove Mohamed bin Humam as governor.<sup>[101]</sup> The **Houthis formally appointed Al-Sayani** governor in October 2018, along with Ahmed Shami as deputy governor.<sup>[102]</sup>

Al-Sayani's experience and his willingness to challenge attempts from within the Houthi authority to impose spending or other financial policies he deemed unwise or improper led Al-Sayani to offer his resignation many times. Houthi leader Abdelmalik al-Houthi trusted Al-Sayani's financial judgement and often intervened on his behalf, financial sector officials told the Sana'a Center on condition of anonymity. They said Al-Sayani most recently had submitted his resignation a week earlier, again over his refusal of certain expenditure requests, but had said hours before he was fired that he had withdrawn it. A senior official told the Sana'a Center that Mahdi al-Mashat, head of the ruling council, had fired Al-Sayani without first informing Abdelmalik al-Houthi.<sup>[103]</sup>

[99] "Republican Decree Appointing a Minister of Finance," official release carried by Ansar Allah Website, September 2, 2019, <https://www.ansarollah.com/archives/274996>

[100] Yemen News Agency (SABA), "President Al-Mashat Appoints Central Bank Governor," SABA, August 25, 2019, <https://sabanews.net/en/news3062219.htm>; Al-Masirah Telegram Channel, August 25, 2019, <https://t.me/amasirah>.

[101] Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, "Yemen Without a Functioning Central Bank: The Loss of Basic Economic Stabilization and Accelerating Famine," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, November 2, 2016, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/55>.

[102] Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, "The Yemen Review – October 2018," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, November 10, 2018, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/6620>.

[103] Sana'a Center interviews with banking officials, August 30, 2019.



## ***Sabafon Moves to Aden After Houthis Announce Takeover***

On August 2, Sabafon **announced via its official Facebook page** the decision to move the telecommunication company's headquarters from Sana'a to Aden.<sup>[104]</sup> The announcement was made three days after members of the Houthi-run National Security Bureau **stormed the main Sabafon building in Sana'a** and announced the formation of a new, Houthi-appointed management team.<sup>[105]</sup>

The Houthis have routinely targeted Sabafon, demanding regular fees be paid to the Houthi authority's Payments and Foreign Currency Committee, which was established in October 2017 and is deployed to collect fees from Sana'a-based banks and businesses, including telecommunications companies. The Houthi authorities are also actively pursuing a lawsuit against Sabafon, seeking to recoup the equivalent of US\$72 million for what they claim were unlawful tax exemptions in 2007 and 2008 while former President Ali Abdullah Saleh was in office.<sup>[106]</sup> Sabafon denies any wrongdoing.<sup>[107]</sup>

According to a Yemeni telecommunications official, the Houthis have also seized property in Sana'a belonging to senior Sabafon officials, as well as detaining and physically abusing other members of staff.<sup>[108]</sup>

## ***Houthis Detain IBY General Manager Ahmed Thabet***

Houthi authorities have detained the general manager of the International Bank of Yemen (IBY), Ahmed Thabet, in Sana'a. Thabet was taken into custody in the last week of July, senior banking officials confirmed to the Sana'a Center.<sup>[109]</sup> The Yemeni news organization **Al-Masdar reported** that IBY had refused a Houthi demand for money prior to Thabet's detention. His current location is unknown.<sup>[110]</sup>

[104] Sabafon, August 2, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/Sabafon/photos/a.661197023932420/2593188624066574/?type=3&theater>.

[105] Yemen Shabab Net, "Houthis Storm Sabafon headquarters, impose new administration by force," Yemen Shabab Net, August 1, 2019, <https://yemenshabab.net/news/48577>.

[106] Sana'a Center interviews with Sabafon officials in November 2018 and August 2019.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Sana'a Center interview, August 23, 2019.

[109] Sana'a Center interviews with senior banking officials on August 22, 2019.

[110] Al Masdar Online, "Houthis Kidnap International Bank of Yemen Director in Sana'a," Al Masdar Online, August 10, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/170191>.

## Humanitarian Developments

### *UN Investigates Graft at World Health Organization's Yemen Offices*

The World Health Organization is investigating corruption in its Yemen office including the deposit of millions of dollars in staff's personal bank accounts, the appointment of unqualified people to high-paid positions, the disappearance of tons of medicine and fuel and the approval of contracts without proper paperwork, *The Associated Press (AP) reported* in August.<sup>[111]</sup>

In November 2018, WHO auditors began investigating Italian national Nevio Zagaria, who headed the agency's Yemen office from 2016 to September 2018 during which time it was plagued by nepotism and corruption, the AP reported. Zagaria appointed a university student and a former intern to senior posts and tasked them solely with looking after his dog, officials told the AP. He also approved contracts without a competitive bidding process; firms awarded WHO contracts hired friends and family of WHO staff and overcharged for services, according to the AP.

Zagaria also approved the deposit of US\$1 million into WHO employees' personal bank accounts. The WHO allows aid funds to be transferred directly to staff in order to speed up procurement in a crisis, but under Zagaria it was often unclear how employees were spending the money, the AP reported.

Several hundred thousand dollars in aid was transferred to the account of Omar Zein, deputy head of WHO's Aden branch, and Zein could not account for more than half of it, according to officials and internal documents seen by the AP. Zein allegedly also ran a nonprofit with a US\$1.3 million UN contract to run programs in Mukalla; UNICEF later found that the nonprofit had no presence in the city and had fabricated reports. Zein also served as an official advisor to the Yemeni government's health minister.

UN auditors had collected evidence of WHO graft on laptops, but these were confiscated in October 2018 at Sana'a airport by armed Houthi militiamen as the auditors were leaving Yemen, the AP reported. The Houthis had been tipped off by a WHO employee, Tamina al-Ghuly, who had taken bribes to hire people and added ghost employees to the WHO payroll whose salaries she collected, according to the AP. Al-Ghuly has been suspended but remains a WHO employee.

Meanwhile, UNICEF is investigating a staffer, Khurram Javed, who allowed a Houthi leader to travel in a UN vehicle protected from coalition airstrikes. He has since been transferred to another office, UNICEF officials told the AP.

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[111] Maggie Micheal, "UN probes corruption in its own agencies in Yemen aid effort," *The Associated Press*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/dcf8914d99af49ef902c56c84823e30c>.

## *WFP Resumes Food Aid After Deal with Houthis*

The World Food Programme (WFP) is restarting assistance to 850,000 people in Sana'a after signing an agreement with Houthi authorities, the **UN agency said** in August.<sup>[112]</sup> The WFP had partially suspended food aid to the Houthi-controlled capital in June over the diversion of aid. The agreement, signed August 3, grants the WFP unimpeded access to areas in which it works, the UN agency said. Houthi authorities also agreed to allow the UN agency to conduct a biometric registration process for beneficiaries, after which the WFP will begin cash transfers to the local population. Houthi authorities had **initially rejected** the introduction of a biometric registration system and said the process should be run by the Yemeni Social Welfare Fund.<sup>[113]</sup>

## *UN: Yemen Programs to Close Amid Funding Shortages*

Donor countries have paid less than half of the \$2.6 billion pledged to the humanitarian response in Yemen for 2019, the **office of UN humanitarian coordinator Lise Grande said** on August 21.<sup>[114]</sup> Briefing the UN Security Council, the UN's Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs **Ursula Mueller said** the largest donors, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, had paid "only a modest share" of what they had promised. In Geneva in February, **Riyadh and Abu Dhabi pledged** \$750 million each to the humanitarian response in Yemen.

## *Migrants to Yemen Increase in the First Half of 2019*

The number of East African refugees and migrants to Yemen has spiked in 2019, **the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) said**.<sup>[115]</sup> The International Organization of Migration estimated that April and May saw some 18,300 and 18,900 migrants arrive, respectively – the highest monthly figures since counting began in 2006 – while roughly 84,400 East Africans were estimated to have arrived from January to June, 2019. Most arrivals are Ethiopians seeking to transit to the Gulf.

[112] "World Food Programme welcomes process on key accountability measures with the Sana'a-based authorities," World Food Programme, August 9, 2019, <https://www.wfp.org/news/world-food-programme-welcomes-progress-key-accountability-measures-sanaa-based-authorities>.

[113] Aziz El Yaakoubi and Lisa Barrington, "Yemen's Houthis and WFP dispute aid control as millions starve," Reuters, June 4, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-wfp/yemens-houthis-and-wfp-dispute-aid-control-as-millions-starve-idUSKCN1T51YO>.

[114] "Humanitarian programmes in Yemen forced to shut due to lack of funding," UN Office of the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, August 21, 2019, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HC%20Statement\\_Sanaa\\_21August2019\\_Final.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HC%20Statement_Sanaa_21August2019_Final.pdf).

[115] Danielle Botti and Melissa Phillips, "Record number of refugees and migrants arrive in Yemen amidst intensifying and complicated war," Mixed Migration Centre, August 19, 2019, <http://www.mixedmigration.org/articles/record-numbers-of-refugees-and-migrants-arrive-in-yemen-amidst-intensifying-and-complicated-war/>.



*Relatives of the prisoners search pictures of some of the victims to identify missing family members at the Dhamar General Hospital on September 3, 2019. Some bodies were unidentifiable after the strike // Photo credit: Saqr Abu Hassan.*

## International Developments

### At the United Nations

#### ***Frustration Grows over Slow Progress Implementing Stockholm Agreement***

At a **UN Security Council (UNSC) briefing on August 20**, UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths acknowledged the widespread frustration among stakeholders that, eight months on, the Stockholm Agreement's requirements to withdraw forces from Hudaydah City, form a joint committee in Taiz and complete a prisoner exchange deal had yet to be fulfilled.<sup>[116]</sup> Griffiths appeared to try and manage expectations of what the Hudaydah agreement could achieve in his remarks to the UNSC. The deal, he said, was intended as a humanitarian stop-gap measure to avert further conflict and not as “a precedent for addressing the underlying issues of the conflict, the most essential of which of course, is the issue of sovereignty.” That’s a notable shift from earlier this year, with Griffiths **saying** in February that the momentum created by the Hudaydah ceasefire could translate toward a political solution to the conflict.<sup>[117]</sup>

[116] “Briefing of the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General For Yemen to the Open Session of the Security Council,” United Nations, August 20, 2019. <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/briefing-special-envoy-united-nations-secretary-general-yemen-open-session-security-council>

[117] “Moving from a promise made in Sweden towards hope for peace in Yemen,” UN News, February 19, 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/02/1033101>.



According to the special envoy, the priority in Hudaydah remains the redeployment of forces away from the city and the establishment of a tripartite mechanism to monitor the withdrawal. The UN, following direct talks last month between the Yemeni government and the armed Houthi movement on Hudaydah as part of the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC), presented proposals to both parties for the implementation of phase 1 of the withdrawal agreement from the city. Griffiths said he expected official responses by August 25.<sup>[118]</sup>

Later, following talks with Houthi leader **Abdelmalik al-Houthi** in Sana'a on August 21 and with **President Hadi** in Riyadh on August 27, the special envoy tweeted that both parties had provided comments on the proposal and would discuss it at an upcoming RCC meeting; no date was provided.<sup>[119]</sup> The departure of General Michael Lollesgaard, whose term as head of the UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) and chair of the RCC **expired at the end of July**, is likely to stall UN mediation efforts while logistical arrangements are made for his replacement. Thus far, a successor has not been publicly named.<sup>[120]</sup>

## Regional Developments

### *Tehran Accepts Houthi Ambassador, Officially Recognizing a Houthi Government*

Abdelmalik al-Houthi, leader of the Houthi movement, announced the appointment August 17 of an ambassador from the Republic of Yemen to Iran. Iran's acceptance of Ibrahim al-Delami, director-general of Houthi-run Al Masirah TV, marks the first official diplomatic recognition of the Houthi-led government in Sana'a by another country. The internationally recognized Yemeni government, which severed diplomatic relations with Iran in 2015 over Tehran's alleged support for the Houthi movement, **slammed** the move as a "flagrant violation of international laws and customs."<sup>[121]</sup> During the announcement, Al-Houthi **said** his government planned to reactivate 70 agreements between Yemen and Iran that were frozen by the Hadi government.<sup>[122]</sup> On September 1, Al-Delami officially **presented** his credentials as ambassador to Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif.<sup>[123]</sup>

Al-Delami's appointment came after Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei publicly declared his support for the Houthi movement during an August 12 meeting in Tehran with Houthi spokesperson Mohammed Abdel Salam. During the talks,

[118] "Briefing of the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General For Yemen to the Open Session of the Security Council," United Nations, August 20, 2019.

[119] Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen Twitter Account, August 27, 2019, <https://twitter.com/UNDPPA/status/1150453036063559681>.

[120] "Yemen Briefing and Consultations," What's In Blue, August 19, 2019, <https://www.whatsinblue.org/2019/08/yemen-briefing-and-consultations-12.php>.

[121] "Government outraged as Yemen rebels make TV boss 'ambassador' to Iran," The National, August 18, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/government-outraged-as-yemen-rebels-make-tv-boss-ambassador-to-iran-1.899666>.

[122] "Iran recognizes Houthis government," Al-Sahwa, August 18, 2019, <https://alsahwa-yemen.net/en/p-32640>.

[123] YemenMonitorTwitter, September 1, 2019, <https://twitter.com/YeMonitor/status/1168193793839042560?s=20>.

Abdel Salam delivered a letter from Abdelmalik al-Houthi to Khamenei. Khamenei asked the Houthi delegation to give Iran its vision for how a deal or compromise to end the conflict would look, Abdelmalik al-Ajri, a senior Houthi official who attended the meeting, told the Sana'a Center.

While in Tehran, Abdel Salam also met with Zarif.<sup>[124]</sup> The Iranian foreign ministry organized a **meeting** August 18 with the Houthi delegation and ambassadors from the UK, France, Germany and Italy to exchange views on the conflict in Yemen.<sup>[125]</sup>

### ***Bio: Ibrahim al-Delami, the new Houthi Ambassador to Iran***

The new Houthi ambassador to Iran, Ibrahim al-Delami, enjoys close ties with the movement's leader, Abdelmalik al-Houthi. He often has traveled with spokesperson Mohammed Abdel Salam on trips abroad to meet with international stakeholders in the Yemen conflict.

Al-Delami is a hardline Houthi ideologist who also enjoys good relations with Hezbollah, the powerful Lebanese Shia political and militant group backed by Iran. He has been based in the Lebanese capital Beirut since at least 2012, serving as the director-general for Houthi-owned Al Masirah TV. Hezbollah officials helped set up the TV station and facilitate residency permits for employees. Al-Delami also served as the point man for transferring funds raised in a 2018 Hezbollah charity drive among its constituency to the Houthi movement in Yemen.

### ***Russian Mideast Envoy Meets with Rival Yemen Stakeholders***

August saw Russia continue its efforts to cement a role as a key interlocutor in the Yemen conflict. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister and President Putin's Middle East Envoy Mikhail Bogdanov met with a Houthi delegation – which included Houthi chief spokesperson Mohammed Abdel Salam and Abdelmalik al-Ajri, uncle of Houthi leader Abdelmalik al-Houthi – in Muscat on August 27.<sup>[126]</sup> According to Houthi media, the Russian envoy stressed the importance of moving toward a comprehensive political settlement to the conflict. While in Oman, the Russian envoy also **held talks** with the Omani minister responsible for foreign affairs, Yusuf bin Alawi.<sup>[127]</sup>

From the Omani capital, Bogdanov traveled to the UAE, meeting with the Emirati minister of state for foreign affairs, Anwar Gargash, on August 31. According to a Russian statement, the two parties **agreed** on the need for peaceful settlements to

[124] "Iran's Zarif visits Doha after talks with Houthi official," The National, August 11, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/iran-s-zarif-visits-doha-after-talks-with-houthi-official-1.897173>.

[125] "Trilateral meeting in Tehran stresses a political solution for Yemeni crisis," Mehr News Agency, August 17, 2019, <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/148977/Trilateral-meeting-in-Tehran-stresses-a-political-solution-for>.

[126] "الوفد الوطني يلتقي في مسقط نائب وزير الخارجية الروسي والسفير البريطاني" ("National delegation meets in Muscat with Russian deputy foreign minister and British ambassador") Ansarollah, August 29, 2019, <https://www.ansarollah.com/archives/274056>.

[127] "Bin Alawi receives Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, holds diplomatic talks," Times of Oman, August 26, 2019, <https://timesofoman.com/article/1826642/Oman/Government/Bin-Alawi-receives-Russian-Deputy-Foreign-Minister-holds-diplomatic-talks>.

conflicts in the Middle East through UN-led political processes.<sup>[128]</sup> The talks came a day after the Russian foreign ministry **expressed concern** over the Emirati airstrikes in southern Yemen and called on all parties to exercise restraint.<sup>[129]</sup> Russia has taken over the presidency of the UNSC for the month of September, and will play a key role in deciding how the council reacts to President Hadi's request for intervention in southern Yemen following the Emirati bombardment of government troops.

While in Abu Dhabi, Bogdanov also held separate talks with a **delegation from the STC** and **Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh**, eldest son of the late Yemeni president. Sources who attended the meeting told the Sana'a Center that Saleh, who is under UN sanctions, restated his demand that Russia, as a permanent UNSC member, play a role in getting his international travel ban and asset freeze lifted.<sup>[130]</sup>

By engaging with all of Yemen's internal and regional players, Moscow has attempted to cast itself as a strong international mediator. The country's increasing involvement in the region reflects a shift away from the ideology-based strategies of the Soviet era that once defined its relationship with countries like Yemen toward a pragmatic strategy that prioritizes potential economic and geopolitical gain. Being able to claim credit for helping to bring peace to Yemen would serve the Kremlin on both fronts (for more information on Russian involvement with Yemen, see: **Yemen's Role in Moscow's Middle East Comeback**).<sup>[131]</sup>

## ***Signs of UAE-Iran Rapprochement in Maritime Security Agreement***

A meeting of Emirati and Iranian officials on maritime security cooperation in waters bordering both countries, the first of its kind since 2013, represents a departure from the more hawkish approach Abu Dhabi had adopted toward Iran in recent years. **During the visit to Tehran**, a seven-member delegation from Abu Dhabi met July 31 with Iranian security officials, including police border guard commander General Ghasem Rezaei.<sup>[132]</sup> The Emiratis came away with **a memorandum of understanding** to enhance cooperation in the strategically important Strait of Hormuz.<sup>[133]</sup>

[128] "Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia meets with UAE State Minister of Foreign Affairs," Russia Today, August 31, 2019, <https://russian.rt.com/world/news/663926-rossiya-oae-vstrecha>.

[129] "Russia concerned by UAE airstrikes on Yemen – Foreign Ministry," TASS Russian News Agency, August 31, 2019, <https://tass.com/world/1075858>.

[130] "وفد من المجلس الانتقالي يلتقي نائب وزير الخارجية الروسي" ("Transitional Council delegation meets Russian deputy foreign minister"), Aden Gad, August 31, 2019, <https://adengad.net/news/406572/>; "أحمد علي عبدالله صالح يلتقي نائب وزير الخارجية الروسية" ("Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh meets Russian Deputy Foreign Minister"), Crater Sky, August 30, 2019, <https://cratersky.net/posts/22488>.

[131] Mustafa Naji, "Yemen's Role in Moscow's Mideast Comeback," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 28, 2019, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/7576>.

[132] Amir Vahdat and Aya Batrawy, "UAE and Iran hold rare talks in Tehran on maritime security," AP, July 31, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/49c6da1c33fd45bbaf1b14836ee5e2ec>.

[133] "Iran, UAE sign document to boost maritime security cooperation," Press TV, August 1, 2019, <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2019/08/01/602439/Iran-UAE-maritime-security>.

## *Oman to Host Direct US-Houthi Talks*

The US plans to hold direct talks with the Houthi movement in Oman in response to recent fighting in southern Yemen, the Wall Street Journal **reported** August 27, saying momentum for diplomacy and direct talks with the Houthis has increased in Washington amid a growing view that the Saudi-led military coalition lacks military options.<sup>[134]</sup> Talks would be led by Christopher Henzel, who was appointed ambassador to Yemen in April, according to the WSJ.

Senior Houthi leaders confirmed to the Sana'a Center such discussions will be held with Omani mediation, but said the talks are still in the planning stages. Diplomatic sources told the Sana'a Center that Qatari mediators had pushed for the talks. US officials met with the Houthi movement in 2015 to press for a ceasefire early in the conflict, and again in December 2018 during UN-led peace talks in Sweden. However, there have not been any significant direct negotiations under the Trump administration.

## *First Countries Join the US-led Maritime Coalition*

Britain announced August 5 that it was joining the US-led maritime coalition to secure shipping in the Gulf. The US proposal has met with **tepid support** from allies, particularly from European and Asian oil importers concerned it would further increase tension with Iran. The plan would provide escorts for merchant ships off the coast of Iran and Yemen.<sup>[135]</sup> The **announcement of the UK's participation** by new British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, which is set to include Royal Navy escorts by two warships, reversed plans laid out by his predecessor Jeremy Hunt for a European-led mission to distance countries from Washington's policy of asserting maximum pressure on Tehran.<sup>[136]</sup>

More countries committed to some degree of participation in the mission throughout August. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said on August 6 that his country was **assisting the coalition** with intelligence support.<sup>[137]</sup> Bahrain became **the first Arab country** to join after King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa announced his country's participation during an August 19 meeting with the head of US Central Command, General Kenneth McKenzie. Manama hosts the US Fifth Fleet and already serves as headquarters for the US-led Combined Maritime Forces, a 33-nation alliance that

[134] Dion Nissenbaum and Warren P. Strobel, "U.S. Plans to Open Direct Talks With Iran-Backed Houthis in Yemen," The Wall Street Journal, August 27, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-plans-to-open-direct-talks-with-iran-backed-houthis-in-yemen-11566898204?mod=e2tw>.

[135] Sylvia Westall and John Irish, "Allies play hard to get on U.S. proposal to protect oil shipping lanes," July 19, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-iran-tanker-allies/allies-play-hard-to-get-on-u-s-proposal-to-protect-oil-shipping-lanes-idUSKCN1UE0KI>.

[136] "UK to join US-led taskforce in Gulf to protect merchant ships," BBC News, August 5, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-49240867>.

[137] "Israel involved in US-led naval mission in Strait of Hormuz – foreign minister," Times of Israel, August 6, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-involved-in-us-led-naval-mission-in-strait-of-hormuz-foreign-minister/>.



conducts anti-piracy operations in the region.<sup>[138]</sup> Meanwhile, **Australia** joined the mission on August 21, with Prime Minister Scott Morrisons saying that Canberra would send a surveillance plane before the end of the year and an Australian frigate from the start of 2020.<sup>[139]</sup>

Four oil tankers were sabotaged off the Emirati coast in May, and Iranian forces seized a British-flagged tanker in the Gulf on July 19 in retaliation for the British seizure of an Iranian tanker off the coast of Gibraltar earlier in the month. The US and Saudi Arabia blamed the sabotage attacks on Iran.

## In Europe

### ***Gibraltar Releases Iranian Tanker, British-Flagged Vessel Still Held by Tehran***

Gibraltar **freed** the Iranian oil tanker on August 15 that it had detained on suspicion of carrying oil to Syria, and a US State Department official **warned** countries on August 23 against allowing the ship to dock.<sup>[140]</sup> The Grace 1 – now rechristened the Adrian Darya 1 – was seized July 7 by British commandos after authorities alleged the ship was bound for Syria's Baniyas refinery, which is subject to EU sanctions.<sup>[141]</sup> The Iranian tanker, which is carrying an estimated \$130 million of Iranian crude oil, was subject to a last-minute attempt by US authorities to prevent its release.

The US Treasury Department labeled the ship “blocked property” on August 30, saying that anybody providing support to the vessel risked being sanctioned.<sup>[142]</sup> The same day, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo **tweeted** that reliable information indicated that the Adrian Darya 1 was headed for Tartus, Syria.<sup>[143]</sup> On September 3, the tanker turned off its transponder in the Mediterranean, west of Syria, and could not be detected, **tracking data showed**.<sup>[144]</sup>

The ship's initial seizure set off a diplomatic incident between Britain and Iran, which was compounded by the Iranian seizure of the British-flagged oil tanker *Stena Impero* off the coast of Iran on July 19. While Iranian authorities maintain the *Stena Impero*

[138] Joyce Karam, “Bahrain becomes first Gulf country to join US-led maritime coalition,” The National, August 19, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/bahrain-becomes-first-gulf-country-to-join-us-led-maritime-coalition-1.900203>.

[139] “Australia joins US-led maritime security mission in Gulf,” The Daily Star, August 21, 2019, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2019/Aug-21/490058-australia-joins-us-led-mission-to-protect-hormuz-shipping.ashx>.

[140] Lesley Wroughton, “U.S. will aggressively enforce sanctions over Iran tanker: State Department official,” Reuters, August 23, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-iran-tanker-usa/u-s-will-aggressively-enforce-sanctions-over-iran-tanker-state-department-official-idUSKCN1VC2MC>.

[141] “Iran oil tanker: Gibraltar orders release of Grace 1,” BBC News, August 15, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-49362182>.

[142] “Treasury Targets Oil Tanker Adrian Darya 1 and its Captain,” U.S. Department of the Treasury, August 30, 2019, <https://home.treasury.gov/press-releases/sm765>.

[143] US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Twitter, August 30, 2019, <https://twitter.com/SecPompeo/status/1167576352473702401>.

[144] “Iranian tanker Adrian Darya 1 goes dark off Syria,” Reuters, September 3, 2019, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-iran-tanker/iranian-tanker-adrian-darya-1-goes-dark-off-syria-idUKKCN1VO0XL>.

was detained over maritime violations, Iran's defense minister, Brig. Gen. Amir Hatami, has suggested it was **seized in retaliation** for the *Adrian Darya 1*.<sup>[145]</sup> The *Stena Impero* was still in Iranian custody as of this writing, while Zarif **told reporters** at the end of August that Iran was expediting legal processes against the UK ship.

### ***Sweden Begins Initiative to Jumpstart Peace Process***

Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom started a trip September 1 to the Middle East intended to relaunch peace talks between the internationally recognized Yemeni government and the Houthi movement. Sweden's chief diplomat **met** with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi in Amman before heading to the Saudi capital of Riyadh, where she held talks with Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalik and other Yemeni government officials.<sup>[146]</sup> On September 2, she met with Houthi officials in Oman, **AP reported**.<sup>[147]</sup> Wallstrom also plans to visit the UAE and meet with UN officials during her trip.

Sweden hosted the last round of direct peace talks between the Yemeni government and the Houthi moment in December 2018, which resulted in the signing of the Stockholm Agreement. However, eight months on, all parts of the deal remain unfulfilled. The Swedish foreign minister **characterized** the accord as "fragile" and expressed Sweden's belief that it was "our responsibility to try to ensure that this agreement is implemented."<sup>[148]</sup>

### ***EU Ambassador to Yemen Takes On New Post***

August 31 marked the **end of the term** of Head of the EU Delegation to Yemen Antonia Calvo Puerta, who had held the post since October 2016.<sup>[149]</sup> Diplomatic missions and embassies in Sana'a closed after Houthi forces seized the capital. Under Calvo Puerta, the EU's delegation for Yemen set up headquarters in Amman, Jordan, seeking a neutral destination. Many countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom, moved their Yemeni missions to Riyadh, capital of war coalition member Saudi Arabia and base for the Yemeni president it backs. In August 2017, Calvo Puerta, who is moving on to lead the EU Delegation to Costa Rica, was the first western ambassador to **visit Sana'a** during the conflict. She is being **replaced** by Hans Grundberg, who previously headed the Gulf Section at the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>[150]</sup>

[145] "UK-flagged oil tanker seizure; Iran's will respond to threats: Defense Minister," IRNA, July 24, 2019, <https://en.irna.ir/news/83406347/UK-flagged-oil-tanker-seizure-Iran-s-will-to-respond-to-threats>.

[146] Ahmed al-Haj and Samy Magdy, "Saudi-led airstrikes kill at least 100 in rebel-run prison," AP, September 2, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/319bfc3b5dbf4c7daa13273a692e7aaf>.

[147] "Saudi-led airstrikes on Yemen rebel-run prison kill more than 100," Los Angeles Times, September 2, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-09-02/saudi-led-airstrikes-on-yemen-rebel-run-prison-kill-more-than-100>.

[148] Ahmed al-Haj and Jan M. Olsen, "Sweden's FM to tour Mideast to relaunch Yemen talks," AP, August 30, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/c0135a03e4b6492bbf43378477dd8841>.

[149] EUinYemen Twitter, August 31, 2019, <https://twitter.com/EUinYemen/status/1167759320718725121>.

[150] "High Representative Federica Mogherini announces senior nominations," Press Club Brussels Europe, July 9, 2019, <https://www.pressclub.be/press-releases/high-representative-federica-mogherini-announces-senior-nominations-2/>.

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