

The Yemen Review

FEBRUARY 2019



DIPLMACY SINKING AT HUDAYDAH PORT



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.

COVER PHOTO:

Al-Muhdhar mosque in Tareem, Hadramawt governorate, which appears on the 500 rial Yemeni banknote, is thought to have been built in the 5th century by the ruler at the time, Omar al-Muhdhar bin Abdul Rahman al-Saqqaf. The surrounding town is a historic center for Islamic scholarship. Pictured here on February 3, 2019 // Photo Credit: Naif M. Alnajm

The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies

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

CONTENTS

The Sana'a Center Editorial	4
The Apology of Aid	4
Diplomacy Sinking at Hudaydah Port	7
Stockholm Implementation Stalls as Ceasefire Violations Mount	7
• RCC Agrees on Phased Approach to the Hudaydah Agreement	7
• Differing Interpretations of 'Local Security' Create Impasse for Implementation	8
• Access Secured to Grain Stores at Red Sea Mills	9
• No Agreement on Prisoner Exchange	9
• No Progress on Taiz	10
International Diplomatic Developments	11
High Level Pledging Event for Yemen Raises US\$2.62 Billion	11
UN Special Envoy Briefs Security Council	11
In the United States	12
• New Fronts Open in Congress Targeting US policy in Yemen	12
In Europe	14
• Senior MP Supports, Lords Criticize UK Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE	14
• Arms Debate Triggers Dispute Between UK and Germany	15
Other International and Regional Diplomatic Developments	16
• 'Quad' Group meets in Warsaw	16
• Yemeni FM Interaction with Israeli PM Goes Viral	16
• Morocco Withdraws from Saudi-led Coalition	17
Developments in Yemen	18
Military and Security Developments	18
• Clashes Between Houthi Forces and Tribesmen in Hajjah	18
• AQAP vs Daesh Rivalry Continues	19
• Heavy Airstrikes in Houthi-Held Areas	20
Political Developments	21
• Warring Parties Tussle Over Parliamentary Legitimacy	21
• New Houthi Security Chief	21
• Hadramawt and Marib Strategic Forum meets in Amman	22
Economic Developments	22
• Yemeni Banks Face Repercussions for Dealing with Central Bank in Aden	22
• Aden to Increase Monitoring and Regulation of Money Exchange Companies	23
• Government Announces Plans to Increase Oil Production in 2019	24
Humanitarian Developments	24
• Taiz In Focus: Poorly Coordinated and Irregular Humanitarian Assistance	24
• UNOCHA: 24 Million Yemenis in Need of Humanitarian Assistance	26
Human Rights and War Crimes Developments	27
• Investigation Links Arms Sale to UAE with Militia Threat in Yemen	27



Farmers were harvesting potatoes at the end of the season in al-Wadi district, Marib governorate, on February 17, 2019 // Photo Credit Ali Owidha

The Sana'a Center Editorial

The Apology of Aid

Of the 40 nations and international organizations that offered up funds at last month's High Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were by far the largest donors. Between them they committed more than half of the US\$2.62 billion raised. These two nations, given how they have pursued their military intervention in Yemen since 2015, also bear primary responsibility for creating and perpetuating the country's humanitarian crisis. The next largest donor was the United Kingdom which, along with the United States, has provided crucial political and military support to the Saudi-led military coalition and leveraged its permanent seat at the UN Security Council to undermine attempts to hold the parties of the conflict accountable for war crimes.

With a handful of exceptions, most donor countries at the pledging event – whether through their diplomatic support, their arms sales, or through their silence – have been accomplices to the war in Yemen and the horrors it has wrought. In 2016, Saudi Arabia also threatened to withdraw hundreds of millions of dollars in UN aid funding in a successful blackmail of then-UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, forcing the latter to remove the kingdom from a UN report that said it was guilty of killing and maiming children in Yemen.

In this light, most of the governments pledging to finance the UN humanitarian effort in Yemen last month cannot be seen as altruistic actors grounded in moral conviction. Rather, humanitarian aid – alongside weapons, sanctions and diplomatic maneuvering – has become an integral part of the tool kit nations involved in this conflict deploy when expedient. For whatever else it is, giving to the aid effort in Yemen is an attempt to save face for those parties who have helped facilitate, and often profited from, the single largest manifestation of human suffering in the modern era. Their aid offering is an apology for failing to take real action to stop this outrageous, ongoing atrocity.

US and UK officials have often argued that their support of the Saudi-led military coalition has actually helped reduce the war's toll on civilians. The argument is that through their diplomatic support the US and UK have maintained access and influence with Saudi and Emirati decisionmakers, and that through providing such things as precision-guided weapons, coalition aircraft have been able to clearly discern and strike targets on the ground. The reality, however, is that unwavering diplomatic support for Riyadh and Abu Dhabi has simply normalized the coalition's reckless behaviour, and rather than preventing civilian casualties, the continued provision of advanced weaponry has enabled the coalition to carry out precisely-guided war crimes.

UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations operating in Yemen have for years been calling on the international community – in particular the US, UK and the UNSC – to call out the coalition for its wrongdoings. This begs the question, however: are these humanitarian actors in Yemen adhering to any greater principles than the governments they criticize? The aid funding raised last month is, of course, only half the equation. The other half is where this money ends up going in Yemen – something that has become increasingly problematic the longer the conflict has persisted.

Individual aid workers, both foreign and local, have regularly made immense personal sacrifices while working to alleviate the suffering of Yemenis. At times this has come at the cost of their own lives. However, in private conversations with staff from UN agencies, INGOs and local NGOs operating in Yemen, aid workers have told the Sana'a Center that they and their organizations have long been aware that the armed Houthi movement has been manipulating and abusing the humanitarian effort on a massive scale. This has involved both orchestrated and systemic directives from the central Houthi leadership, as well as opportunistic profiteering by local forces. The abuses include direct and widespread theft and extortion of aid; diverting aid deliveries to the Houthis' preferred recipients; manipulating the movement and operations of aid organizations; forcing aid organizations to employ Houthi partisans; denying visas and travel permits to aid workers in retaliation for perceived transgressions; harassing, threatening and imprisoning aid workers, among many others abuses.

Faced with escalating interference with their personnel and operations, aid organizations had, until recently, remained silent. Their argument was that criticizing and calling out Houthi forces for offenses would invite retaliation and risk their losing access to vulnerable populations. This silence, however, has normalized and implicitly facilitated Houthi forces' behavior. Recent media investigations – notably by the Associated Press – have exposed the issue and forced the World Food Program

(WFP) to publicly condemn the Houthi forces' abuse of the aid effort. This has both put the WFP's essential operations in many parts of Yemen at risk, but it has also broken the silence.

Without international humanitarian aid it is clear that the humanitarian crisis would be far more dire. What is also clear is that aid organizations' failure to hold Houthi forces accountable has allowed this belligerent party to, in many ways, craft the humanitarian effort in the areas it controls to serve its vested interests. Internationally, the emphasis on aid has also warped popular perceptions of the conflict and allowed members of the international community to shirk their responsibility to take concrete steps to stop the war.

Should enough political will arise in Western capitals, and enough international diplomatic pressure be brought to bear on the warring parties, this conflict would end and the immediate threat of mass starvation in Yemen could be quickly addressed. Short of this, no amount of aid will be sufficient to halt the growing humanitarian disaster.

Diplomacy Sinking at Hudaydah Port

Stockholm Implementation Stalls as Ceasefire Violations Mount

Efforts to implement the Stockholm Agreement – reached between the internationally recognized Yemeni government and the armed Houthi movement at United Nations-sponsored peace talks Sweden in December 2018 – continued to face implementation challenges in February. While during negotiations in Hudaydah last month the warring parties agreed to a phased approach in mutually redeploying forces away from the port and city, implementation stalled over disagreements regarding the composition of the local forces that would take over security. Both parties took intractable positions in seeking to ensure control over these forces, with little apparent room for compromise between them.

Regarding the other aspects of the Stockholm Agreement, negotiations on a prisoner exchange continued without significant progress, while no developments came regarding the city of Taiz. Meanwhile, there were regular ceasefire violations in and around Hudaydah City and the wider governorate in February. One positive development was that both parties agreed to allow the UN access to the Red Sea Mills grain storage facility in Hudaydah for the first time in six months.

RCC Agrees on Phased Approach to the Hudaydah Agreement

The Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) met for the third time on February 4-5. The RCC was formed to support and facilitate implementation of the Hudaydah agreement, one of three agreements reached in Sweden. The UN chartered a boat, which it anchored in the Red Sea, to provide a neutral venue for the meeting; the previous meeting, scheduled for January 8, had been derailed after Houthi negotiators refused to enter Yemeni government-held territory to attend.

The UN said that the February meeting brought the parties “closer to agreeing modalities for Phase 1 redeployment than they were six weeks ago,” though noted the complexities involved with “disengaging forces in close proximity of each other.” The meeting was the last convened by General Patrick Cammaert, whose departure as RCC chair was announced in January. In an interview with Dutch media in February, Cammaert said the Stockholm Agreement, while still a breakthrough diplomatically, was “to say the least, vague,” and that it “underestimated the deep, deep mutual distrust and hatred” between the warring parties. Cammaert was replaced by Lieutenant General Michael Lollesgaard, who assumed his duties on February 5.

Lollesgaard facilitated discussions at the fourth RCC meeting, held on February 16 -17 in Hudaydah City. The meeting resulted in “an agreement on Phase 1 of the mutual redeployment,” the UN said. The parties also agreed, in principle, on Phase 2 of the mutual redeployment, “pending additional consultations within their respective leadership,” according to a UN statement. UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths told Al-Arabiya that Phase 1 of the Hudaydah agreement entailed the redeployment of Houthi forces from the ports of Ras Issa, Saleef and Hudaydah, and both parties redeploying away from the road to the Red Sea Mills to allow access to the grain storage facility. Phase 2, Griffiths said, will lead to the demilitarization of Hudaydah and the city’s return to civilian life.

Differing Interpretations of ‘Local Security’ Create Impasse for Implementation

Despite reports that Houthi forces would withdraw from Saleef and Ras Issa ports on February 25, by the end of the month no withdrawal had taken place. Ambiguities in the text of the Hudaydah agreement continued to be used to delay progress on its implementation. The agreement calls for the redeployment of forces away from the city and ports of Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Issa, after which security of the city and ports would be “the responsibility of local security forces in accordance with Yemeni law.”

Several international diplomatic sources, and sources in Yemen privy to the RCC meetings, outlined for the Sana’a Center the dynamics that unfolded related to the Hudaydah agreement in February. Among these were that parameters of withdrawal and the makeup of local security forces have been key points of contention in discussions to implement the deal. The forces discussed by the RCC were the port authorities, the coast guard and the security guards of state institutions.

As Khaled al-Yamani, foreign minister for the internationally recognized Yemeni government, said that the government’s position was that security should be handed over to the local forces who were in place before the armed Houthi movement took control of state institutions in 2014. The government’s view was that if it were to redeploy its troops away from Hudaydah without securing authority over local security forces, it will have lost the opportunity to take control of the city.

Meanwhile, Houthi negotiators sought to hand over control to the current local authorities, which include personnel appointed by Houthi authorities. After taking control of the capital Sana’a in 2014, the armed Houthi movement formed a Supreme Revolutionary Committee and later the Supreme Political Council (SPC) to serve as Yemen’s interim authority, with responsibility for making security appointments, among other tasks. The SPC, however, disregarded governorate-level security and public service rules and regulations in personnel appointments. For Houthi negotiators, personnel the SPC hired into Hudaydah’s local authorities are entitled under Yemeni law to retain their posts under the Hudaydah agreement.

Yemeni government negotiators, however, maintained that Yemeni law does not

apply to the armed Houthi movement, which it considers a rebel group. The Yemeni government had previously pointed out that the current commander of the coast guard is also a Houthi commander who had never served in the coast guard before.

A UN official said that until the composition of security forces in Hudaydah is resolved, no progress will be possible on any part of the Stockholm Agreement.

Meanwhile, regular armed skirmishes continued in Hudaydah city throughout the month, with each side reinforcing positions and buttressing their defenses. Hostilities also continued in districts in the south of the governorate, which also fall into the ceasefire zone agreed to at the end of 2018.

Access Secured to Grain Stores at Red Sea Mills

Throughout February, UN Security Council member states and UN officials repeatedly called on the warring parties to allow access to the Red Sea Mills in Hudaydah. The facility stores enough grain to feed 3.7 million people for a month, which the UN previously warned was at risk of rotting. The UN gained access to the mills on February 26 for the first time in six months in a move UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres described as a sign of progress. While the UN aid workers reported that there were some signs of infestation, there was no water damage to the stores.

Another UN official, however, said privately that allowing the UN to access the mills had not required the warring parties to pull back or concede anything of significance. Meanwhile, getting grain out of the mills would require some 1,500 trucks. For each delivery, Houthi forces would have to open a mined road; Houthi forces were unlikely to keep the road open as this would allow an opportunity for opposing forces to enter, the official explained.

No Agreement on Prisoner Exchange

The Stockholm Agreement also included a prisoner exchange deal. While it was initially envisioned that the exchange could take place as early as January, the deal has also been beset by challenges which continued in February. The Supervisory Committee to implement the exchange, co-chaired by the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen (OESGY) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), held its second meeting on February 5 – 8 in Amman, Jordan. Representatives of the internationally recognized Yemeni government and the armed Houthi movement failed to finalize lists of prisoners to be released. The head of the Houthi delegation to the talks, Abdul Qader Murtada, told Reuters that the Yemeni government had accounted for just one tenth of the 7,500 Houthi prisoners held in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Houthi representatives recognized only 3,600 of 9,500 names of detainees submitted by the Yemeni government, the Houthi official said.

Meanwhile, alongside the prisoner exchange talks, a Sub-Committee on Dead Bodies and Human Remains held its first meeting and agreed on a joint plan of action and a timeline to exchange bodies. Representatives of the Yemeni government and the

Houthi movement agreed to release 1,000 bodies from each side in three stages, beginning with the release of bodies from morgues, the Associated Press (AP) reported.

No Progress on Taiz

No progress was reported in February on the Statement of Understanding on Taiz, which was the third aspect of the Stockholm Agreement, along with the prisoner exchange and the Hudaydah agreement. Taiz City has been among the most active frontlines in the conflict, with Houthi forces applying a siege to large portions of the city for almost five years (see below ‘Taiz in Focus’). In a briefing to the UN Security Council, the UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths said that warring parties had reaffirmed their commitment to the statement, and he pledged to “focus all our efforts on meaningful steps to make a difference in Taiz.”

International Diplomatic Developments

High Level Pledging Event for Yemen Raises US\$2.62 Billion

International donors pledged US\$2.62 billion at the High Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen on February 26 in Geneva. This was the third year running that Switzerland, Sweden and the UN have co-organized the event. The pledged funds were higher than in 2018, when donors promised \$2.01 billion to fund the humanitarian response in Yemen. However, UNOCHA said that the UN Humanitarian Response Plan for 2019 will required US\$4.2 billion to reach the 21.4 million people in need assistance and protection.

Of the 40 donor countries and organizations, the highest contributions came from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who pledged \$750 million each, followed by the United Kingdom, which pledged to donate \$261.44 million. Discussions at the event also included ways economic improvements in Yemen would help address the humanitarian crisis.

UN Special Envoy Briefs Security Council

In a briefing to the UN Security Council (UNSC) on February 19, the UN Special Envoy updated the council on progress on the Stockholm Agreement. He urged the warring parties to immediately begin implementing the agreed redeployment from Saleef and Ras Issa, and to agree on the details of the redeployment from Hudaydah port and city. All 15 members states of the Security Council delivered statements during the session and expressed concern over the continued deterioration of the humanitarian situation. They reaffirmed the council's support to the Special Envoy and Lollesgaard, the new RCC chair.

Following the council's public briefing, member states moved into closed consultations with the Special Envoy and were briefed by the RCC chair. Sources who attended the consultations told the Sana'a Center that while Griffiths expressed optimism about the ongoing efforts, Lollesgaard was more frank in discussing the challenges of implementation and highlighted the deep distrust between the warring parties in Hudaydah. When asked, neither the Special Envoy nor the RCC chair were able to confirm dates for the agreed redeployment, a reflection of the precarious situation in Hudaydah.

Also on February 19, during discussions between civil society groups and UNSC member states in New York, council members noted that while there were “carrots and sticks” that could be used in the future, there was no contingency plan in place if the Stockholm Agreement should fall apart and full conflict resume. Council members also warned that if violations of the ceasefire and international humanitarian law continued, and without real evidence of implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, the unity of the Security Council could erode.

The Security Council issued a press statement on February 22, stressing the importance of implementing the commitments of the Stockholm Agreement “without delay.” The UNSC expressed concern at continued reports of violations of the ceasefire. Member states reiterated their intention “to consider further measures, as necessary, to support implementation of all relevant resolutions.”

Other United Nations Developments in Brief:

- **February 4:** The UN Security Council issued a Press Statement on Yemen, expressing concern regarding alleged ceasefire violations and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, among other issues.
- **February 22:** The UN Security Council issued a Press Statement welcoming the progress made in planning for the redeployment of forces in Hudaydah and urging immediate implementation of the agreement to redeploy forces from the ports of Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Issa.
- **February 26:** The UN Security Council unanimously adopted a routine/technical resolution (2456 of 2019) renewing the mandate of the Sanctions Committee, established in 2014, for one year. In the resolution, the council also asked the Panel of Experts, which reports to the 2140 Sanctions Committee, to provide a mid-term update to the Committee by July 28, 2019.

In the United States

New Fronts Open in Congress Targeting US policy in Yemen

In February, lawmakers continued their legislative drive to either stop or limit US involvement in the Yemen conflict, building on the momentum established in Congress toward the end of last year. On February 13, in a 248-177 vote, the House of Representatives passed a resolution that would end support for the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen. The Senate was expected to consider a related bill shortly after the House vote, but Senate Republicans moved to block a vote on the legislation in its current form on February 25.

Following the House vote, the White House said that it would veto H.J.Res.37 should it make it to the Oval Office, echoing statements made after a similar resolution cleared the Senate in December. The resolution is not expected to become law; there is no two-thirds majority in Congress to override a presidential veto and the constitutionality of

the War Powers Act (upon which the resolution is based) is fiercely debated. Even if it did enter into law, the wording of the legislation leaves enough wiggle room for the US to feasibly continue its support of the Saudi-led military coalition at its current level and scope.

While H.J.Res.37 lacks legal teeth, advocates of the bill say its symbolic and political weight could be brought to bear on the Trump administration, which may then push for concessions from the Saudi-led coalition. The administration has thus far, however, appeared somewhat impervious to this type of political pressure – especially when it comes to foreign policy.

Reintroduced legislation tying the conflict in Yemen to the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi is also currently under consideration. The Senate Saudi Arabia Accountability and Yemen Act of 2019 would ban the sale of certain weapons to Saudi Arabia and prohibit aerial refueling of coalition aircraft – support which the US military announced the end of in November 2018. It also calls for sanctions on individuals impeding humanitarian access in Yemen. A broader bill in the House seeks to halt all “security assistance” and arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Also under consideration at committee stage is a bill that seeks to preclude any attempts to resume US aerial refueling of coalition aircraft.

It is unlikely any of these bills, as they currently stand, will become law. However, legislators could ultimately attempt to package the basic contents of these bills into amendments to larger, omnibus bills that are considered “must pass” and therefore more difficult for the White House to veto. This tactic was employed successfully last year with an annual defense spending bill that included an amendment requiring the US State Department to certify that coalition operations in Yemen had violated federal or international law in Yemen.

Other Developments in the United States in Brief:

- **February 4:** A CNN investigation claimed that coalition partners passed on, sold, or abandoned US-made weapons in Yemen, possibly in violation of export agreement terms. The report said that some of these arms and equipment ended up in the hands of non-state actors – some of which the US designates as terrorist organizations. The report put a spotlight on US weapons export controls; in response, head of Central Command (CENTCOM) Gen. Joseph Votel said that the US must assess the claims made in the report.
- **February 11:** In a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, CENTCOM chief Gen. Joseph Votel said that the US has access to information detailing the operations undertaken by US-refueled coalition aircraft in Yemen. In a previous hearing in March 2018, Votel said that the Pentagon does not track these aircraft, or have access to this information from other sources. The Department of Defense has faced calls for greater transparency over its role in airstrikes in Yemen, which the UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) says have killed more than 10,000 civilians since the Saudi-led military coalition entered the war in 2015. While the US announced the

end to aerial-refueling in November 2018, there have been long-standing legal concerns in Washington that this assistance could make the US government, and individual servicemen and women, complicit in what the UN says are possible war crimes.

- **February 25:** An American oil engineer was reunited with his family after spending 18 months in captivity in Yemen. Danny Burch, who worked for the Yemeni Safer oil company, was taken from the streets in Sana'a in September 2017. President Donald Trump thanked the UAE for its support in Burch's release, while the State Department suggested he had been freed in a rescue operation. Later reports, based on the accounts from Yemeni and US officials, said that Burch had been kidnapped by a group led by Ali Nasser Huraiqidan, and was freed in an "armed raid" involving the UAE. Huraiqidan's group has been accused of kidnapping other foreign nationals in Yemen for ransom payments, or to sell to al-Qaeda.

In Europe

Senior MP Supports, Lords Criticize UK Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE

In February, debates about arms sales to Saudi Arabia continued in Europe, triggering tensions in the UK, and between London and Berlin. A report published on February 16 by the Select Committee on International Relations, an all-party committee within the UK's House of Lords, said the government's arms sales to Saudi Arabia brought the UK "narrowly on the wrong side" of international humanitarian law. The committee called on the government to individually assess the implications of arms export licenses and to "be prepared to suspend some key export licences to members of the coalition." The report also called for stronger diplomatic engagement by the UK government to support the UN-led peace process and the work of the UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, including through a more assertive role as penholder of the Yemen file at the UN Security Council. Notably, the report affirmed that Saudi Arabia's "misuse" of its weaponry was causing civilian deaths.

Earlier in February, the head of the Commons' Committees on Arms Export Controls (CAEC), Labour MP Graham Jones, had questioned the reliability of British NGOs' casualty figures on Yemen, which he said were exaggerated. The arms export supervisor said Iran and the armed Houthi movement were primarily to blame for the Yemen war. The Houthi forces' use of human shields could offset the effect of even "the wisest of consideration" of military actors, Jones said.

A legal debate over the lawfulness of UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia is set resume in April and will likely fuel civil society pressure on British decisionmakers. In July 2017, the British High Court ruled in favor of the government in a lawsuit filed by the Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) on this matter. An appeal by CAAT is to be heard at the Court of Appeal in April 2019.

Arms Debate Triggers Dispute Between UK and Germany

The issue of arms sales to Saudi Arabia also sparked quarrels between the UK and Germany, when Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt criticized the halt of German arms exports to Saudi Arabia in a letter to his German counterpart on February 7.

On February 19, Der Spiegel leaked excerpts of the document, a day before Hunt's visit to Berlin for Brexit talks.

In the letter, Hunt stated that the German halt in deliveries was harming the British and European arms industries; UK defense companies would be unable to fulfil Saudi orders for the Typhoon and the Tornado fighter jets, which rely on German parts, he wrote. Hunt called on Germany to exclude joint European projects from its arms embargo against Saudi Arabia, insisting that Berlin had "politically committed" itself to these projects and risked a "loss of trust in Germany's credibility as a partner." The current delay in German arms deliveries to the UK, France and other European countries was further endangering NATO's defense capabilities, the UK foreign secretary added.

At a joint press conference in Berlin after their meeting in Berlin on February 20, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas told his British counterpart that Berlin would not resume arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Future decisions on the issue would depend on developments in the Yemen war and the implementation of the Stockholm agreements, Maas said. Hunt, however, said that it was crucial to uphold strategic relations with Saudi Arabia, which had enabled the UK to push for the Stockholm talks.

Meanwhile, the French partially state-owned Naval Group signed an agreement with Saudi Arabia's state arms producer Saudi Arabian Military Industries, paving the way for a joint venture to boost the Saudi navy.

Other Developments in Europe in Brief:

- **February 11-14:** An EU mission led by the Head of the EU Delegation to Yemen Antonia Calvo Puerta visited Aden, following a similar visit to the southern city in January. The mission met with Yemeni government officials, including the deputy prime minister, various ministers and the governor of Aden to discuss current and future EU-funded development projects.
- **February 18:** The Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union met and adopted conclusions on Yemen for the first time since June 2018. The Council welcomed the Stockholm Agreement and reiterated its support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen, for a UN-led negotiation of a political solution to Yemen's conflict, and for the UN Special Envoy and the UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA).
- **February 19-21:** Following an official invitation by the European Parliament, a Houthi delegation met with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in Brussels, according to a statement by Houthi spokesperson Mohammed Abdulsalam. The delegation included Abdulsalam and Abdulmalek al-Ejri, who were both part of the delegation representing the armed Houthi movement at the UN-led peace talks in Stockholm in December 2018. According to Sana'a

Center sources who attended the meeting, the Houthi officials presented the MEPs with a list of 300 prisoners who were among those that the Yemeni government had asked the Houthi movement to release as part of the Stockholm Agreement prisoner exchange. The Houthi officials alleged that these prisoners were member of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Abdulsalam added that among them are “terrorists” that President Hadi’s government itself had imprisoned, when Hadi ruled from Sana’a.

- **March 1:** UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt posted online a photo of himself and head Houthi negotiator Mohammed Abdel Salam, saying the two had met in Oman for talks on the Stockholm Agreement. Two days later Hunt was in Aden, where he met with Yemeni government Foreign Minister Khaled al-Yamani.

Other International and Regional Diplomatic Developments

‘Quad’ Group meets in Warsaw

On February 13, the US held an international conference in Warsaw, Poland, widely viewed as an American effort to build international solidarity against Iran. While conference organizers said 60 states attended, few major European countries sent high level diplomatic staff.

UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said he would only attend the conference if a ministers from the so-called ‘Quad’ multilateral group – the US, UK, Saudi Arabia and the UAE – convened a meeting on the sidelines to discuss the situation in Yemen. Speaking to British media before the conference, Hunt said that the Yemeni peace process had entered an “absolutely critical phase” and that “we now have a shortening window of opportunity to turn the ceasefire into a durable path to peace.” According to Sana’a Center sources, Yemen has become a priority for the UK foreign secretary, in part due to parliamentary pressure on the issue.

Following the quad meeting in Warsaw, the group issued a joint statement calling on all warring parties to “rapidly and fully implement” the Stockholm Agreement, and to redeploy their forces from Hudaydah city and ports, in line with their obligations under the agreement, with “no further delaying tactics.” The ministers discussed Iran’s “destabilizing effect on Yemen,” the humanitarian crisis and the need to stabilize Yemen’s economy, and agreed to “redouble their efforts to reach a political solution.”

Yemeni FM Interaction with Israeli PM Goes Viral

At the opening session of the Warsaw conference, as representatives of the various countries took their seats around the table, Yemeni Foreign Minister Khaled al-Yamani was placed between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Later in the session, Netanyahu’s microphone

failed to work as he attempted to address the delegates; al-Yamani lent him his own microphone, leading Netanyahu to joke that this signaled a new cooperation between the two countries.

Foreign ministers from Oman, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Tunisia also attended the session. Afterwards, Netanyahu proclaimed it a “historic turning point” and called on Arab states to continue normalizing ties with Israel.

Numerous internet memes depicting al-Yamani as being cosy with Netanyahu quickly went viral, however, and the Yemeni minister was widely panned across Yemen for what was said to be normalizing ties with Israel and abandoning the Palestinian cause. The Houthi press office issued a statement saying: “Al-Yamani’s act of sitting next to Netanyahu reflects the national treachery and moral bankruptcy of the Saudi-led government in Yemen.”

Al-Yamani himself blamed conference organizers for the “protocol error” in seating him next to the Israeli PM, and said that the Yemeni government “position on the Palestinian cause, people and leaders is unchangeable and non-negotiable.”

Morocco Withdraws from Saudi-led Coalition

The AP quoted Moroccan officials last month as saying that their government had stopped taking part in military action with the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen. Morocco has not shared details of its military role in Yemen, but Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita said in January that the “form and the content” of Morocco’s military participation in Yemen had changed. Rabat recently recalled its ambassador to Saudi Arabia, amid rising tension with Riyadh over the conflict in Yemen, among other issues, the AP reported on February 8.

Morocco’s political and military support for the coalition had been waning throughout 2018. While Rabat’s withdrawal is likely to have little military impact on the coalition, as other coalition members face growing domestic pressure over their participation in the war on Yemen, Morocco’s stand could have a reputational price on Saudi Arabia.

Other International Diplomatic Developments in Brief:

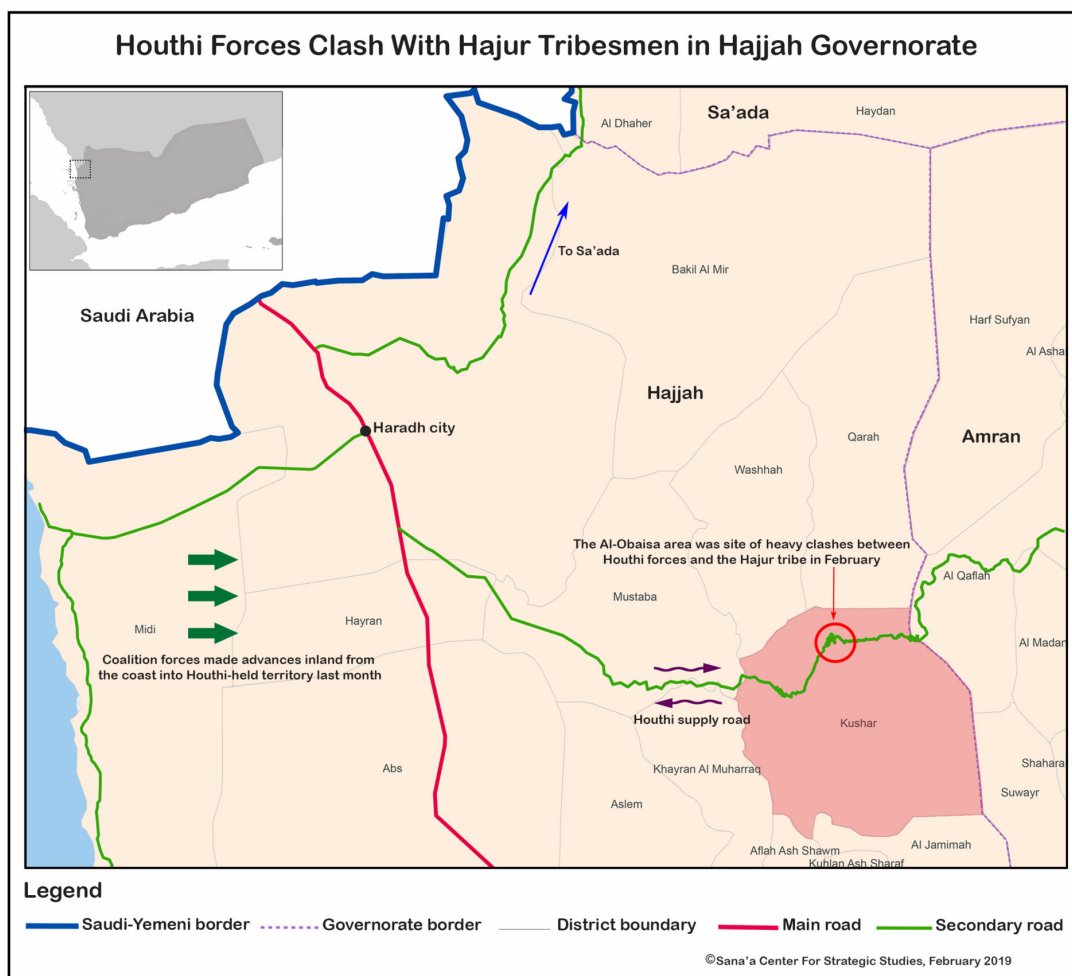
- **February 4:** During a visit to the UAE, Pope Francis criticized the war in Yemen, decrying “the logic of armed power” and singling out Syria and Yemen as evidence of the misery and death caused by conflict. The Pope had faced criticism over the visit to the UAE, as part of the Emirates’ self declared ‘Year of Tolerance’, due to its role in the Yemen war.
- **February 20:** Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne said that an arms embargo on Saudi Arabia was under review during a heated parliamentary session in which the government faced criticism over arms export licenses to Riyadh – and particularly over whether these arms would be deployed in the Yemen conflict.

Developments in Yemen

Military and Security Developments

Clashes Between Houthi Forces and Tribesmen in Hajjah

February saw the biggest clashes between Houthi forces and tribesmen in Hajjah since the beginning of the war, centered on the Kashar district of the northwestern governorate. Houthi forces have encroached on territory dominated by the powerful Hajur tribe since December, imposing what local tribal leaders have called a siege, and reportedly seeking new recruits in the area. Clashes escalated in mid-February when tribesmen cut off Houthi supply lines, prompting military retaliation and arrests, which were met with coalition airstrikes on Houthi positions. On February 23, Yemeni government forces ordered the deployment of seven battalions to Hajjah to “lift the siege” on the Hajur tribe.



Source & Graphic: Ghaidaa Alrashidy

There had been an understanding between the Houthis and the Hajur tribe since 2015, based on mutual non-interference. However, recent changes on battlefields in Hajjah appear to have altered this dynamic. Kashar district is strategically positioned on the edge of Yemen's highlands, making it a potential stepping stone to the Houthi stronghold of Sa'ada for coalition-backed forces, which have been gradually advancing inland from Hajjah's coast toward Haradh city. The epicenter of the fighting between Houthi forces and the Hajur tribe is the al-Obaisa area of Kashar, through which runs the main road leading from Haradh to the Yemeni highlands.

There were also smaller-scale clashes between Houthi forces and tribesmen in other governorates during the past month. Houthi forces destroyed the homes of tribal leaders in al-Dhalea, and backed Ryam tribesmen in clashes with members of the Bani Abbas tribe in al-Bayda governorate. In Ibb governorate's Alkfar district, local recruitment attempts by the Houthis descended into fighting with Meftah tribesmen. Some media outlets have suggested these developments constitute a coordinated "tribal uprising" against the Houthis, a characterization that Dr. Khaled Fattah, an expert and author on Yemen's tribes, told the Sana'a Center is inaccurate. Fattah said that these hostilities fall outside of the Houthi-Yemeni government dynamic, though adding that Houthi forces have responded to these localized armed confrontations with an iron fist to deter further destabilizing tribal-led challenges to their authority.

AQAP vs Daesh Rivalry Continues

Two key trends regarding al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the so-called 'Islamic State' group, or Daesh, continued throughout February. First, the number of attacks carried out by terrorist groups in Yemen continue to be well below 2017 and 2018 levels. For instance, AQAP claimed more than 200 attacks each of the last two years. This year AQAP has claimed only a handful of attacks.

Second, AQAP and Daesh continued to clash throughout February. The conflict, which began in July 2018 over a dispute at a checkpoint, has grown into a consuming struggle for the groups. Indeed, the vast majority of the attacks AQAP does carry out are now directed at Daesh, its jihadi rival. For instance, Elisabeth Kendall, who tracks the number of attacks closely, noted in mid-February that of AQAP's 19 claimed attacks so far this year, 11 had targeted Daesh. Kendall also noted in a separate article that the jihadi infighting may be the result of seeds planted by "regional intelligence agencies."

Whatever the reason, the jihadi civil war now appears to be the key struggle for both groups. The two sides snipe back-and-forth at one another on the battlefield and on media platforms. This month AQAP released the fifth in a series of videos entitled, 'God Testifies that they are Liars', designed to show Daesh's misdeeds in Yemen. All of the fighting has taken place in al-Bayda, where Daesh is located and where AQAP has a strong presence. The few Daesh attacks targeting the Houthis have also taken place in al-Bayda. Daesh did not target any Yemeni or coalition affiliated forces in February.

On February 13, AQAP killed three members of the Security Belt Forces with a roadside bomb in Abyan. AQAP also carried out a handful of attacks against Houthi forces in al-Bayda, usually via roadside bombs.

Both AQAP and Daesh appear weaker than at any point in recent years. Each organization has fragmented and frayed, and each appears to be struggling to coordinate both its message and its men. Daesh is now, to judge from the publicly available evidence, no more than several dozen fighters. AQAP certainly has more men, but the disjointed nature of the organization under Qasim al-Raymi's leadership, the difficulty in communicating across battlefronts in Yemen, and the number of spies that have infiltrated AQAP in recent years means that it has been severely hampered. Local cells in different parts of Yemen are still able to carry out attacks, but the group no longer acts as a single organization in Yemen.

Heavy Airstrikes in Houthi-Held Areas

Airstrikes continued in and around Sana'a, where the coalition said it was conducting a campaign against Houthi drone facilities following an attack on a Yemeni government military parade in Lahj governorate in January. Heavy airstrikes against Houthi forces were also reported in Sa'ada, Hajjah, Marib and al-Bayda. Pro-Houthi media said that the group continued to fire ballistic missiles at targets in southern Saudi Arabia's Jizan, Najran and Asir governorates throughout the month.

Other Military and Security Developments in Brief:

- **February 14:** An explosion at a market in Mocha, Taiz governorate, reportedly killed four people and injured eight more. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, or a similar incident in the port city last month, which killed six people. Such incidents are rare in Mocha, which has a heavy UAE security presence and acts as a base to support coalition operations in neighboring Hudaydah governorate.
- **February 18:** The Southern Transitional Council leadership called for the UAE-backed Hadrami Elite Forces to take over security in Wadi Hadramawt, as well as in other southern governorates, at the second meeting of the STC's Southern National Assembly meeting. The government of Yemen's First and Second Military Region forces, aligned with Vice President Ali Mohsen and President Hadi, have been competing with UAE-backed local forces for security control in Wadi Hadramawt. In the second half of the month two soldiers, from the first and second regional forces respectively, were assassinated in separate incidents in Wadi Hadramawt.
- **February 20:** Unidentified gunmen killed Faisal Dhibian, an employee from the government's audit office in Aden, who was the head of anti-corruption operations in land ownership cases.

Political Developments

Warring Parties Tussle Over Parliamentary Legitimacy

Calls for elections by the Houthi leadership in early February prompted the Yemeni government to announce the relocation of the country's election commission, as the warring parties sought to assert their legitimacy in Yemen. On February 2, the Supreme Political Council instructed the Supreme Commission for Elections and Referendums (SCER), which has been under Houthi control since their takeover of the capital in 2014, to make preparations for elections to replace deceased Members of Parliament (MPs).

Two days later, President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi issued a decree to relocate the election commission to Aden and made fresh calls for a parliamentary session in the temporary capital. Yemen's last parliamentary elections took place in 2003 and MPs have not sat in session since the outbreak of the current conflict. While minimum attendance requirements have precluded the reconvening of parliament in Aden, in January Hadi said that quorum had been achieved and that a session would soon be called. Efforts by Hadi and Saudi Arabia to convene Yemen's parliament either in Aden or Riyadh have been ongoing since mid-2017, as yet without success.

If Hadi were to convene parliament in Aden, such a move would likely prompt an escalation on another front in Yemen's war: that between the Yemeni government and southern separatist groups. The self-styled representative of the southern independence cause, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), has consistently opposed Hadi's calls for a meeting of parliament based on its current makeup. Given that some STC members are also still technically MPs, their refusal to attend a session would likely sink Hadi's plans. It is also not clear whether the STC, who mostly control security in Aden, would even allow the parliament to convene in the city.

The STC's Southern National Assembly held its second session in Mukalla, Hadramawt on February 16-17, during which STC Vice President Maj. Gen. Ahmed Said Ben Brik called on MPs to join the rival legislature. However, the Southern National Assembly also advocated rehabilitating the STC's relationship with President Hadi, as one of the standout outcomes of the meeting. Sana'a Center sources say that that Hadramawt's governor did not meet the STC leadership during their visit, nor did local leaders participate in the session.

New Houthi Security Chief

On February 18, Fawaz Hussein Nashwan replaced Abdullrab Garafan as head of the Houthi-controlled intelligence agency, the National Security Bureau (NSB). Garafan had held the position since Houthi authorities took hold of Yemen's state security and intelligence apparatus in 2014. The NSB, which was established in 2002, is one of Yemen's intelligence services, along with the Political Security Organization (PSO), created shortly after the unification of Yemen in 1990. Most civil and political prisoners detained by the Houthis are held by the NSB. In the past, the NSB imprisoned armed extremists and held Houthi leaders during the six wars the armed movement fought against the Yemeni government in Sa'ada governorate between 2004 and 2010.

Hadramawt and Marib Strategic Forum meets in Amman

On February 24-27, the Hadramawt and Marib Strategic Forum met in Amman, Jordan. The event brought together dozens of prominent participants from both governorates – including academics, activists, local authority representatives and journalists – to discuss mechanisms to establish peace and socioeconomic stability. The meeting was the third in a series of similar meetings of this Track II initiative, organized by the Sana’a Center and the Oxford Research Group.

Economic Developments

Yemeni Banks Face Repercussions for Dealing with Central Bank in Aden

On February 10, members of the Houthi-run National Security Bureau (NSB) arrested three Tadhamon International Islamic Bank (TIIB) staff, including the treasury director, from the bank’s main branch in Sana’a. According to several Sana’a Center sources, the National Security Bureau forcibly intervened after Tadhamon refused to sell foreign currency to Houthi-linked businessman, Yahya Ali al-Habari, at a below-market exchange rate. Al-Habari, who is a prominent food importer, turned to Tadhamon after the Yemeni government-controlled central bank in Aden declined his request for import financing.

The central bank in Aden introduced a new import financing regime in mid-2018 through which traders who meet specified criteria could qualify for import financing at a preferential exchange rate (for details, see the Sana’a Center’s April, May, June, and October 2018 monthly reviews). For instance, on February 25, the Yemeni rial was trading on the local market in Aden at YR580 per US\$1 while the central bank in Aden’s import financing mechanism was offering traders YR440 per US\$1 to finance basic commodity imports.

Foreign ministers from the so-called ‘Quad’ – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the US and UK – who met in Warsaw, Poland last month, issued a joint statement on February 13 condemning what they said was Houthi authorities’ “illegal interference” in Yemeni banking operations.

The NSB released all three Tadhamon employees in the last week of February.

The Houthi authorities had previously warned Yemeni banks against engaging with the central bank in Aden and the Yemeni government-appointed Economic Committee, particularly in regard to the new fuel and food import regulations (for more information see The Yemen Review – October 2018). However, in recent months several Yemeni commercial banks have opened their own connections to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) network via their Aden-based branches, according to Sana’a Center sources, with other banks looking to follow suit.

Aden to Increase Monitoring and Regulation of Money Exchange Companies

On February 10, the central bank in Aden issued a circular regarding the ongoing license-renewal application process for Yemeni money exchange companies. The bank's new licensing requirements compel money exchange outfits to submit more detailed information regarding their recent transactions, as well as their local and regional financial networks. Yemeni money exchange companies have until the end of March to fulfill the new licensing obligations or risk being decertified.

The central bank in Aden's efforts to increase monitoring and regulation of Yemeni money exchange companies form part of the Yemeni government's broader strategy to try and redirect import financing back into the formal economy (i.e. the commercial banking sector). A multitude of challenges arising from the conflict have weakened Yemen's banking sector (for details see the Sana'a Center's recent paper: *Revitalizing Yemen's Banking Sector: Necessary Steps for Restarting Formal Financial Cycles and Basic Economic Stabilization*). As a result, money exchangers and informal, unmonitored financial networks have handled exponentially larger volumes of currency transfers. This has facilitated both Houthi smuggling networks – in particular fuel smuggling via Iran, which has become a significant source of revenue for the group – and increased Yemen's money laundering and terrorism financing risks.

On March 4, the Yemeni Exchangers Association (YEA) issued a statement expressing its concerns over the contradictory regulations the central banks in Aden and Sana'a were imposing on exchange companies. The YEA stressed the negative impact that the economic tug-of-war between the warring parties is having on the banking sector and the overall economy, and appealed for the banking sector to be able to operate free from political interference.

A prominent representative of a money exchange company who spoke with the Sana'a Center said the YEA was planning to wait until the end of March, and the end of the new licensing application process, to see if its concerns are addressed. If not, the representative said YEA members would close all of their branches across Yemen in protest. Such a move would likely put pressure on the authorities in both Aden and Sana'a to act, and be destabilizing for the Yemeni rial exchange rate, given that money exchangers are the primary conduit for remittances, which are currently Yemen's largest source of foreign currency.

It is important to note that the YEA and the majority of its members are based in the north. YEA members include the largest money exchange companies in Yemen: Al-Noman Exchange Company; Swaid & Sons Exchange Company; Al-Saifi Exchange Company; Al-Jazeera Ikhwan Company for Exchange; Al-Morisi Exchange Company; Al-Najm Express; Al-Yabani Company for Exchange; Al-Akowa Exchange Company; Al-Nasser Exchange Company; and Al-Hazmi Company for Exchange. A number of exchangers located in the south are not part of the YEA.

Government Announces Plans to Increase Oil Production in 2019

On February 10, the Minister of Oil and Minerals for the internationally recognized Yemeni government, Aws Abdullah al-Awd, announced plans to scale up oil production and exports in 2019. Al-Awd said the government aims to produce an average of 110,000 barrels of crude oil per day (bpd) and export an average of 75,000 bpd. Such projections represent a notable increase from 2018, when Yemen produced an average of 45,000 bpd.

Before the escalation of the conflict in March 2015, which was soon followed by the cessation of oil production and exports, Yemen's total production was estimated at 193,000 bpd, according to the Yemen Petroleum Company (YPC). Given that Houthi forces currently control Yemen's primary oil export terminal at Ras Issa port on the Red Sea coast, al-Awd said the government would build a new oil pipeline to the Arabian Sea to facilitate the increased exports.

Yemen's most productive oil fields are Block 18 (most of which is in Marib governorate), Block 14 and Block 10 (both in Hadramawt governorate), which in 2018 produced an average of 4,000 bpd, 14,000 bpd, and 20,000 bpd, respectively. Prior to March 2015, Block 18, Block 14, and Block 10 averaged 40,000 bpd, 37,000 bpd and 50,000 bpd, respectively, according to the YPC.

The minister of oil and minerals also asserted that the government aimed to produce 6.7 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in 2019, around half of which is to be exported. For this to happen, the LNG export terminal located in Balhaf, Shabwa, would need to come back online. Despite repeated government assertions in 2018 that LNG exports were due to resume at Balhaf, this never materialized. And although the terminal is nominally under the control of the government, the UAE-backed Shabwani Elite Forces are stationed in Balhaf and in the vicinity of the export terminal.

Humanitarian Developments

Taiz In Focus: Poorly Coordinated and Irregular Humanitarian Assistance

The city of Taiz, in Yemen's southwest, has been an active frontline in the conflict for almost five years and is among the areas worst affected by the ongoing humanitarian crisis. The city has also recently been the focus of both UN-sponsored peace talks between the warring parties and controversy regarding the diversion of humanitarian aid by armed groups in Yemen. In February the Sana'a Center carried out a series of interviews with residents and aid workers on either side of the front lines to assess their lived experience regarding the humanitarian situation and the international response. In sum, residents and humanitarian workers in Taiz said that not enough aid is reaching the conflict-ravaged city, and that humanitarian assistance is poorly coordinated and irregular.

Around 2.58 million of Taiz's 3.07 million residents are in need of humanitarian assistance, with 81 percent of these requiring immediate assistance to save and sustain their lives, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). Due to multiple constraints, urgently-needed assistance is not arriving, humanitarian workers involved in aid distribution in Taiz told the Sana'a Center. Major roads leading to Taiz are either closed or difficult to access because of the conflict. Food delivery trucks are forced to take alternative routes on difficult roads, which has led to numerous vehicle accidents, while food aid is also regularly at risk of being commandeered en route by armed groups.

Delivering food assistance within Taiz City is also a difficult task, sometimes beset by protests from those who are not included on beneficiary lists. On February 11, at a food distribution point in Jabal Habashi, humanitarian staff denied assistance to a man seeking to use a food voucher in another beneficiary's name. The man returned with armed men and took food by force, a field monitor for an international organization told the Sana'a Center. In response, the organization ceased operations for two days until the man's father, a local sheikh, publicly apologized to staff and a local committee for the incident and returned the stolen food.

An aid worker in a Houthis-controlled district in Taiz said that while humanitarian organizations could access residents, the assistance available was chronically insufficient to meet local needs. Aid workers also reported a lack of coordination between aid organizations funded by different donors – including the UN, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Sometimes, several months passed between projects run by different organizations, during which residents were left without any assistance. While emergency livelihood assistance is needed, it does not provide a sustainable source of income for when funds dry up, aid workers warned.

Residents of Taiz City confirmed that they were not receiving enough food assistance and that deliveries were intermittent. A mother of five in the al-Masbah neighborhood said she received food baskets for three months in 2018. In January 2019, she was registered by a different organization and received one food basket, but she did not know if she would receive any further assistance. Meanwhile, she was struggling to feed her children and depending on occasional remittances from a brother-in-law working in Saudi Arabia.

Locals in Taiz also told the Sana'a Center that several local factors were inflating food prices. Due to road closures, food is delivered to the city in smaller trucks that are able to navigate narrow roads; multiple vehicles are used to carry the load of one large truck. Deliveries from the Hoban area – the location of most of the governorate's factories – to Taiz City takes up to five hours, for a journey that previously took 20 minutes. These factors increased fuel costs – which have become increasingly expensive due to fuel shortages – which in turn drive up the price of food, residents said.

The arrival of internally displaced people (IDPs) to Taiz governorate from Hudaydah in recent months has put added pressure on the humanitarian response. According to UNOCHA, the number of IDPs in Taiz has risen from 85,900 to 403,300 during the last year. In addition, around 110,000 people have returned to Taiz, UNOCHA said, noting that they faced difficulties due to the destruction of property and assets, which they could not afford to repair.

UNOCHA: 24 Million Yemenis in Need of Humanitarian Assistance

UNOCHA reported on February 14 that the number of people in acute need in Yemen rose by 27 percent during the last year. In its Humanitarian Needs Overview for Yemen for 2019, UNOCHA said that some 24.1 million people were in need – more than 80 percent of the population – including 14.3 million people in acute need who required immediate assistance to save and sustain their lives. In 2019, 3.3 million people remain displaced, up from 2.2 million a year earlier; this increase was partly because 685,000 people fled the escalating conflict in Hudaydah in 2018. More than one million people have returned from displacement to their places of origin. The humanitarian response is increasingly becoming the only lifeline for millions of Yemenis, the report noted.

Some 20 million Yemenis are food insecure, including 10 million people suffering extreme levels of hunger and risk of starvation, while soaring fuel costs, due to scarcity, increase the cost to transport water, electricity, health and sanitation services, UNOCHA said. Basic, life-saving and protection services are urgently needed, as well as as advocacy with the parties to the conflict to ensure rapid, unhindered humanitarian assistance, the report said.

Briefing the UN Security Council on February 19, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock said conflict, a failure to respect international law and the economic collapse in mid-2018 were the driving forces behind the deterioration outlined in the report. While funding is quickly becoming the biggest challenge facing the aid operation in Yemen, Lowcock said that humanitarian agencies were also dealing with constant operational obstacles, including visa delays and movement restrictions.

Other Humanitarian Developments in Brief:

- **February 4:** The World Health Organization (WHO) issued a report in which it said cancer has become a “death sentence” in Yemen, given the collapse of the healthcare system, the lack of affordable treatment, and the cost and risk associated with travel to the few available treatment options. The WHO estimated that there are around 35,000 cancer patients in Yemen, including 1,000 children.
- **February 6:** Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said it was “dismayed” by the findings of the Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) in its investigation into the bombing of an MSF cholera treatment center in Abs on June 11, 2018. The JIAT, an investigative body appointed by the Saudi-led military coalition, found that a coalition airstrike targeted a weapons store for the armed Houthi movement. The JIAT said that MSF had not requested to add the site to a no-strike list or put signs on the building’s roof to mark it as a medical facility. MSF responded that it had shared its location with the coalition 12 times in writing, and that the compound displayed three distinctive logos. MSF said that JIAT’s “unacceptable and contradictory claims” had portrayed MSF as responsible for, rather than a victim of, the bombing.

- **February 13:** The Ministry of Health in Sana'a said that 132 people had died from Swine flu in Yemen since 2018, and that the highest number of deaths were in Sana'a, followed by Amran and Ibb.
- **February 28:** The Ministry of Public Health and Population reported 413,770 suspected cholera cases from January 1, 2018 to February 3, 2019, with 543 associated deaths. Children under 5 account for 32 percent of all suspected cases, while 22 of Yemen's 23 governorates have been affected by the outbreak, the WHO said in a statement.

Human Rights and War Crimes Developments

Investigation Links Arms Sale to UAE with Militia Threat in Yemen

An open source investigation published by Amnesty International on February 6 examined the impact of the international arms trade with the UAE on security developments inside Yemen.

Examining open-source evidence on arms used in the course of the Hudaydah battle, the report found that some arms and military vehicles sold to the UAE by the US, the UK, France, Germany and Belgium, among other countries, have ended up in the hands of UAE-backed local militias. These militias are largely unaccountable and some have been accused of committing war crimes.

The report concluded that arms sales to the UAE were in violation of the international Arms Trade Treaty, EU law, and in some countries, domestic law.

Other Human Rights and War Crimes Developments in Brief:

- **February 13:** Houthi media outlets reported that eight fishermen were killed when a coalition airstrike hit their boat, north of the island of Badhei off of the coast of Hudaydah governorate. Médecins Sans Frontières confirmed that it had treated five injured fisherman after a "military attack" on their boat.
- **February 16:** Awfa al-Naami, Saferworld Country Director in Yemen, was released by the Houthi authorities. She and a colleague were detained on January 28 by the Houthi-run National Security Bureau after being called in for questioning, sparking international condemnation and calls for their release. Prior to her detention, al-Naami had been subjected to a coordinated campaign of threats and intimidation for several months.

- **February 19:** Artillery shelling killed eight civilians and injured another 10 at a market in the Mateenah area, west of al-Tuhayat district, Hudaydah governorate. The UN confirmed the attack, without specifying who was responsible. According to UN partners, 96 civilians have died and 175 injured due to hostilities in Yemen between January 1 and February 14.
- **February 20:** UNICEF Yemen reported that 2,700 child soldiers had been recruited in the Yemen conflict. UNICEF also stated that two-thirds of all Yemeni girls were married before the age of 18.
- **February 26:** Amnesty International released its review of the human rights situation in Yemen in 2018, which found that all parties to the conflict had “committed war crimes and other serious violations of international law.”

Acknowledgments

This report was prepared by (in alphabetical order): Ali Abdullah, Waleed Alhariri, Anthony Biswell, Hamza al-Hamadi, Gregory Johnsen, Farea al-Muslimi, Spencer Osberg, Hannah Patchett, Ghaidaa Alrashidy, Sala al-Sakkaf, Victoria K. Sauer, Holly Topham, and Aisha al-Warraq.



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

WWW.SANAACENTER.ORG

Yemen, Sana'a, Hadda St
Tel: +967 1 444 375
Fax: +967 1 444 316
Email: info@sanaacenter.org
f /sanaacenter

This report was developed
with the support of the
Kingdom of the Netherlands



Kingdom of the Netherlands