

The Yemen Review

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STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUTH



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:

Following the Southern Transitional Council's takeover of Socotra in June, the flag of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) was hoisted at the governorate building in the island's capital, Hedebo, seen here on July 1, 2020 // Sana'a Center photo by Saeed Mastour Saeed Salem

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With apparent fuel shortages gripping Houthi-held areas of Yemen last month, queues at gas stations in the Sana'a were seen extending for kilometers on June 17, 2020. For full coverage see: Another Stage-Managed Fuel Crisis in Northern Yemen // Sana'a Center photo by Asem Alposi

The Sana'a Center Editorial

Hadi Must Go

Yemeni President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi is doing his best to prevent an end to the conflict in Yemen. Ensuring that last year's Riyadh Agreement – meant to mend divisions with his rivals in southern Yemen – never gets implemented is only his latest venture in this regard. Hadi's tenure has been a case study in parasitic statesmanship, in which only his amoral pursuit of riches and self-preservation has been able to rise above his ineptitude. During his presidency, now in its ninth year, he has overseen Yemen's steady dissolution from a nation hoping to transition to democracy post-Arab Spring, to a nation fragmented by civil war and regional military intervention, to a land of warring statelets, mass suffering and despair. Enough – it is time for Hadi to go. Once this clear necessity is acknowledged by all concerned parties – in particular Saudi Arabia, his patron, the United Nations Security Council, which bestows on him international legitimacy, and the shrinking number of Yemeni actors who ally with him for lack of better options – then the conversation can shift to how to replace him.

At a basic level, Hadi never had the qualities associated with successful leadership. Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh appointed Hadi his deputy following the 1994 civil war because the latter – showing little in the way of managerial competence, decisiveness, charisma or vision – posed little threat to Saleh's rule. Hadi was a senior southern military figure who fled north following his side's defeat in the 1986

South Yemen Civil War and then allied with the Saleh regime in the 1994 north-south civil war, all of which helped to make him a highly divisive figure with little natural constituency. In the south he is widely regarded with suspicion and contempt. In the rest of the country, he is viewed as a nobody.

Hadi's claim to the presidency is also tenuous. Following the 2011 Yemeni uprising, the internationally-backed Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative facilitated Saleh's exit from office and Hadi's ascent, with the latter's popular mandate of a two-year transitional term affirmed in a one-candidate 'election' in 2012. Hadi subsequently oversaw the nearly year-long National Dialogue Conference, which was meant to bring Yemen's various factions to a consensus on how to address the country's most pressing issues. He then overstepped his mandate and torpedoed the transition by attempting to impose a six-region federation of Yemen that many see as the catalyst for the current armed conflict. Hadi's two-year term was extended for one year in 2014. Following the Houthi forces' invasion of the capital in September of that year, Hadi's flight south and eventually to Riyadh, and the regional military intervention in March 2015, his term as president became indefinite and unaccountable to the Yemeni people.

Hadi's legitimacy to head Yemen's 'internationally recognized government' is almost wholly conferred by the UNSC and the international community through UNSC Resolution 2216, which recognizes him as the legitimate president of Yemen in the wake of the Houthi takeover of Sana'a. His legitimacy is entirely detached from his performance as a head of state. Riyadh, meanwhile, for the most part sees Hadi as useful for providing international legal cover for its military campaign in Yemen, and little else. This lack of accountability has allowed Hadi's presidency to metastasize into a government in exile that serves primarily as a vehicle for corruption.

Hadi's small inner circle, made up of his sons and powerful figures from his home governorate of Abyan, are far from the only figures profiting from the conflict, but given their placement atop the government hierarchy, the scope and scale of their corruption are exceptional. The continuity of this graft is dependent on Hadi maintaining the presidency, while at the same time any negotiated end to the war will likely require Hadi to transition out of power. Knowing this, the president and his circle's vested interests are tied to the war continuing, removing any incentive to compromise during negotiations, whether with the Houthis or nominal allies in the anti-Houthi coalition.

In 2016, Hadi scuttled UN-sponsored peace talks in Kuwait. By firing then-Vice President Khaled Bahah – seen as a potential compromise candidate the warring parties might agree on to replace Hadi – and appointing General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, a figure widely reviled across Yemen, he derailed negotiations and ensured no deal would be reached to replace him. By 2017, his government's failure to provide basic public services in southern Yemen, and his personal targeting of rival southern leaders, led to the formation of the Southern Transitional Council (STC). Backed by the United Arab Emirates, the STC quickly began challenging Hadi for dominance in the south and splintered the common front against the Houthis. This rivalry broke out into open hostilities when STC-affiliated forces drove the Yemeni government out of Aden in the summer of 2019. With clashes again raging in the south, Hadi, the southerner exiled in 1980s South Yemen power politics, has made Abyan's war the Republic's war.

The Saudi-sponsored Riyadh Agreement in November 2019 was meant to mend the divide by integrating the STC into the Yemeni government both politically and militarily, in exchange for the STC having representation in the government delegation at any future UN-sponsored negotiations to end the war. Had genuine reconciliation been Hadi's motivation, he could have eased tension with the STC by incorporating members into his government and demonstrating that he could be their president as well. But as per form, Hadi made no such concession, instead prioritizing a historic local feud over the good of the country.

Today, STC influence in the south is expanding as Hadi shrinks further into exile in Riyadh, leaving Yemenis facing the rapidly spreading COVID-19 pandemic without functioning state institutions to provide them even basic assistance. If the past eight years are any guide, maintaining the political status quo will entail continued failures in governance, further political and social division and unending war for Yemen.

Efforts to put Yemen on a better path politically must start without delay, and the change should begin at the top. The main parties within the anti-Houthi coalition should realize the president is beholden to them, not the other way around, and recognize the Yemeni government can be stronger without him. The parties that signed the GCC initiative and claim to commit to a real political transition for Yemen need to decide whether they are serving Yemen or Hadi.

The Saudis, meanwhile, are well aware of their dysfunctional relationship with Hadi. Ending support for him is both rational and an outside-the-box move to begin repairing the fractured anti-Houthi coalition. Backing the replacement of the ineffectual Hadi with a presidential council, representing the coalition's main Yemeni parties, would be a major, and necessary, step in the right direction.

This bold move will need to be met with clear support from the international community through a new UNSC resolution reflecting the realities in Yemen. The UN claims its current framework responds to threats to peace in Yemen. Hadi has become such a threat and the UNSC should be glad to see the back of him, just as most Yemenis will be.

While pursuing alternatives to the Hadi presidency would carry risks, the current track should, to Yemenis and all concerned stakeholders, be unpalatable. Given the extent of elite capture in the executive office, diluting Hadi's power or replacing him with a single figure would not create the conditions for effective leadership at the head of the Yemeni government to emerge. Rather, a presidential council that offers representation to the various political parties is likely the only viable option to both balance their vested interests and garner enough buy-in to begin reunifying areas of the country outside Houthi control. A more cohesive Yemeni government might then have some chance at developing the institutional capacity to provide for the population, and also be able to put forward a representative delegation for negotiations with the armed Houthi movement to end the wider war.

Developments in Yemen

The Struggle for the South

STC-Backed Forces Seize Socotra

On June 20, the secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC) seized control of the island governorate of Socotra, overthrowing the Yemeni government-backed local authority. The Yemeni government, which is also battling with the separatist forces in Abyan, labeled the STC's takeover as yet another coup.^[1] The two sides are involved in a power struggle in southern Yemen, which escalated with the STC's declaration in late April that it would institute self-rule in governorates that were part of the former South Yemen.

The takeover in Socotra began with STC-aligned forces capturing governorate facilities and military bases in the capital, Hedebo. The Saudi-led coalition, which has troops stationed on the island and had previously brokered an agreement to end the fighting on the island,^[2] attempted to pressure the STC to halt its offensive, but the group refused to do so. Saudi troops did not move, however, to stop the separatist forces. Instead, Ramzi Mahrous, the Yemeni-government appointed governor of Socotra, accused Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates, of letting the STC move into positions that the Yemeni army had withdrawn from as part of negotiations to deescalate the fighting.^[3] Saudi forces sheltered Mahrous and several other officials loyal to the government of President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi before facilitating their evacuation to Al-Mahra on the Yemeni mainland.^[4] According to Sana'a Center sources, Saudi forces remained in control of Socotra's airport and the island's main seaport.

On June 22, the STC moved to stamp its influence by appointing a new governor, Raed al-Thaqali.^[5] It also expelled Yemenis native to the country's north from the island, accusing them of being mercenaries for the Hadi government, while granting an amnesty for any southern opponents.^[6] The STC now controls the local authority

[1] Mohammed Mukhashaf, "Yemen separatists seize remote Socotra island from Saudi-backed government, Reuters, June 21, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-separatists/yemen-separatists-seize-remote-socotra-island-from-saudi-backed-government-idUSKBN23S0DU>

[2] "Yemeni government, southern separatists, sign Socotra truce," Al Jazeera, May 1, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/yemeni-government-southern-separatists-sign-socotra-truce-200502103232655.html>

[3] "In his first comments after his departure ... Governor of Socotra: Saudi forces left transitional forces to control the island [AR]," Al-Masdar Online, June 23, 2020, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/196394>

[4] "Yemen's STC separatists expel northerners from Socotra following takeover," Middle East Eye, June 25, 2020,

[5] "Major General Bin Breik issues a decree assigning Raafat Al-Thaqali to the duties of the head of the Autonomous Administration of Socotra Archipelago [AR]," Southern Transitional Council, June 22, 2020, <https://stcadem.com/news/12196?fbclid=IwAR0N6gaZQnjR0NOaGRa-4aBCX97ioGlgQDqj64qth5tv86FPdp4XHNEUW1M>

[6] "Yemen's STC separatists expel northerners from Socotra following takeover," Middle East Eye, June 25, 2020,

in four southern governorates – Socotra, Lahj, Al-Dhalea, and Aden – granting the group access to locally-generated revenues and providing it additional leverage in Saudi-backed negotiation efforts to end its rivalry with the Yemeni government.

Saudi-Announced Cease-Fire and Govt-STC Talks Fail to Halt Abyan Fighting

Yemeni government and STC-backed forces clashed throughout June in Abyan governorate, undeterred by the Saudi-led coalition's June 22 announcement of a cease-fire negotiated by political leaders of both sides in Riyadh.

Clashes centered in the Sheikh Salam area, with STC forces looking to push east toward the coastal town of Shaqra and government-backed troops trying to move west to the governorate capital, Zinjibar, which sits on the road to Aden. Fighting also continued around the town of Al-Jaar, north of Zinjibar.^[7] Casualties have been high in the governorate, with 85 dead on both sides reported June 11,^[8] and a further 54 killed during a 24-hour-period on June 24.^[9] Despite the attrition, neither side has gained substantial territory.

Saudi-led coalition spokesman Turki al-Maliki had announced that the government and STC had agreed to a cease-fire on June 22. Saudi troops were also deployed to Abyan to monitor the cease-fire and establish a mechanism to deal with violations. However, the agreement remains marred by distrust, with both sides accusing the other of violating the truce.^[10] Saudi Arabia is also sponsoring talks between the STC and Yemeni government leaders in the Saudi capital intended to implement the Riyadh Agreement, the November 2019 deal that ended a previous round of fighting in southern Yemen and laid out a path for the STC to be integrated politically and militarily within the Yemeni government. However, the deal was never put into place, mainly because of disagreements over the order in which aspects of the agreement would be implemented. The STC has pushed for political elements of the agreement – such as the formation of a unity government and the naming of a new governor for Aden – to take precedence, while the government insists first on the security element, which includes the redeployment of troops to pre-August 2019 positions and the STC placing its forces under the command of the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior. It remains to be seen whether the Riyadh Agreement in its current form is salvageable. STC leaders told The Associated Press that while the council is open to the negotiations, it is standing by its self-rule declaration.^[11]

[7] “Renewed confrontations between government and “transitional” forces, despite the announcement of the response to the ceasefire [AR],” Al-Masdar Online, June 23, 2020 <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/196414>

[8] Ahmed al-Haj, “UN: 94,000 Yemenis displaced since January; clashes in south,” The Associated Press, June 11, 2020,

[9] Ahmed al-Haj, “Clashes between Yemen’s govt, separatists mar ceasefire,” The Associated Press, June 25, 2020, <https://apnews.com/24b9688db7784614f79516284caf47d8>

[10] Ahmed al-Haj, “Clashes between Yemen’s govt, separatists mar ceasefire,” The Associated Press, June 25, 2020, <https://apnews.com/24b9688db7784614f79516284caf47d8>

[11] Ahmed al-Haj, “Saudi says Yemen’s govt, separatists agree to truce,” The Associated Press, June 22, 2020, <https://apnews.com/24b9688db7784614f79516284caf47d8>

THE RIYADH AGREEMENT DILEMMA

Commentary by Abdulghani Al-Iryani

A key obstacle to nationwide peace negotiations is the formation of a Yemeni government delegation that includes the Southern Transitional Council (STC). This was meant to be a key outcome of the Saudi-brokered Riyadh Agreement the two rival parties acceded to last year. As it stands, however, successful implementation of the Riyadh Agreement requires redeploying forces loyal to Yemeni President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi in Aden, his government's interim capital, risking renewed bloody confrontations with STC-affiliated forces that would wreck the peace negotiations. This is the dilemma of the Riyadh Agreement.

On November 5, 2019, the Internationally Recognized Government of Yemen (IRG) and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) signed an agreement in Riyadh to end their military confrontations. These had raged in Aden and other southern governorates over the previous months and led to the expulsion of President Hadi's forces from the city. The agreement – styled in the model of the 2016 Kuwait talks between the IRG and the de facto Houthi authorities of Sana'a – stipulated the return of the government to Aden, a power-sharing arrangement and the integration of STC military and security forces into the government armed forces and Ministry of Interior. Upon achieving that, the STC will be included in the national cabinet and any future government delegation to negotiate a nationwide cessation of hostilities with the armed Houthi movement, also known as Ansar Allah, who hold Sana'a and most of Yemen's north.

Since then, implementation of the Riyadh Agreement has been frustrated by disagreement on the sequencing of implementation, an issue that is often cited as the reason for scuppering the proposed 2016 Kuwait Agreement. The STC insists on appointing a governor and a chief of police for Aden before it redeploys its forces out of the city; Hadi insists on the opposite. Distrust and demonstrably bad intentions on both sides have poisoned the implementation talks. While the two sides profess compliance, they continue to take military actions that belie their rhetoric. Fighting has continued on and off since November, with the STC escalating its rhetoric against Hadi and his government, claiming that Hadi is merely a pawn for northern terrorists (a reference to Hadi's governing ally, the Yemeni Congregation for Reform, better known as Islah) and occupiers. Hadi's side, on the other hand, has continued to build up its forces and move units from Marib and Hadramawt to increase pressure on the STC.

The Saudis, who rammed this agreement down the throat of both sides, seemed to have skipped their history lesson. Instead, they bought into the prevailing narrative that presents this conflict as one between a faction, supposedly dominated by northerners, who wish to preserve Yemeni unity, and southerners who are trying to rid themselves from northern domination and restore their old state. Pundits, meanwhile, note the competition between Saudi Arabia and the UAE. They also point out the declared target of the UAE to eliminate Islah. While valid, none of these characterizations captures the nuances of reality.

To understand the nature of the conflict between the Hadi government and the STC, one has to go back to January 1986. Rival factions within the Yemen Socialist Party that governed South Yemen fought a short but very bloody civil war in Aden that claimed more than 10,000 lives in two weeks. Broadly speaking, the conflict pitted two components of southern society against one another: the pastoralists of eastern Abyan and Shabwa (referred to as the Bedouins); and the farmers and warriors of Lahj and Dhalea (referred to as the Tribesmen). The fighting in 1986 was not a lone confrontation between these two distinct groups – it dates far back into history – but it was the most violent. The conflict ended with the defeat of the Abyan/Shabwa Bedouin faction and the expulsion of tens of thousands of its members – including President Hadi – to North Yemen and beyond.

This type of identity conflict is common in Yemen, and society had developed an elaborate tribal code to cope with such conflicts and mitigate their impact. However, Yemenis were shocked at the viciousness and lack of compromise of the 1986 conflict in Aden. Two factors explain its severity. In 1972, the Yemen Socialist Party (then led by the Abyan faction) adopted the Maoist model of socialism and nationalized private businesses, including small ones. Access to state jobs was the only source of livelihood left. Therefore, losing a power struggle was no longer a setback of earnings potential; it became a matter of survival.

Further exacerbating that situation, the YSP organized peasant uprisings beginning in 1972 against landowners and traditional leaders. Sultans, sheikhs, clerics and businessmen – society’s depository of traditional wisdom, accumulated over thousands of years, of conflict management and mitigation – were killed, imprisoned or chased away. In such a traditional society, where modern legal institutions and structures had not yet evolved, that action was tantamount to the society decapitating itself. So conflict could no longer be mitigated as it used to be, or as it continued to be in North Yemen.

In the aftermath of the 1986 civil war, the Bedouins, then derogatorily referred to as Zumra (liberally translated as “desperate band”), were uprooted and their homes were confiscated and occupied by the victors. They ended up in exile in North Yemen, where many were integrated into the armed forces, forming 15 brigades called the Unity Brigades. Along with president Hadi, most of his inner circle were among the survivors of that conflict.

When North and South Yemen agreed to unify in 1990, the winners of the 1986 conflict, the tribesmen, derogatorily referred to as the Toghma (liberally translated as the “Ruling Clique”), demanded that their Zumra enemies be kicked out of Sana’a. President Saleh complied and former president Ali Nasser Mohammed had to leave Yemen, while his colleagues had to disperse in distant governorates such as Sa’ada. Hadi, then viewed as an insignificant exiled officer in the department of military supplies, was spared exile but had to move to Haddah for a few weeks.

In 1994, a simmering confrontation over the implementation of the unity agreement between President Ali Abdullah Saleh and Ali Salem al-Beedh, the former president of South Yemen who assumed the vice president’s post in the unified Republic of Yemen, erupted into a brief civil war. The three month conflict ended with Saleh’s forces marching victoriously into Aden, with the Unity Brigades the spearhead of that army. Saleh made sure to have Southern leadership of the military campaign into

southern territories, so he appointed Hadi, the least illustrious southern commander, as Minister of Defense. As expected, upon taking Aden, Saleh allowed his northern tribal allies the opportunity to loot government property, and sent several top businessmen, including Mohammed Adhban and Saleh al-Murshed, to buy back the loot on behalf of the government. Meanwhile, many exiled southern officers of the Unity Brigades went after their former rivals in the south, seizing their private homes and killing many of them. Most of the atrocities that took place in Aden in 1994 were payback for 1986.

Representation of southern Yemen after the conflict was monopolized by Hadi's group, the Zumra. The Toghma, who represented a majority of the people of the South, were largely marginalized. For years, military and security officers of the Toghma were out of work and often out of livelihoods. Domestic and international pressure forced Saleh to pass decrees to reintegrate them into the national army. Still, Saleh's behavior from 1986 until he resigned in 2012 indicated his intentions to continually undermine the South.^[12] He appointed Hadi as head of a presidential committee charged with reintegrating forcibly discharged southern officers, knowing full well that Hadi would do his utmost to obstruct its implementation to punish his former enemies. In 2001, Saleh tried to tinker with the Zumra monopoly on southern representation by courting some Al-Dhalea figures and firing one of the Zumra's most powerful figures, then-Minister of Interior General Hussien Arab. In response, the Zumra announced a political coalition, Caucus of the Sons of Southern and Eastern Governorates, that threatened to call for southern independence. The Zumra were no more pro-unity than the Toghma, but rather had used their alliances with northern forces and the central government in an effort to marginalize their southern competitor.

This history should make it clear that the struggle for southern Yemen is not merely a political conflict – it is a conflict of identities. Southerners, especially the Toghma-affiliate STC, are doing themselves a disservice by presenting the conflict as one between the South and the North, as denying the real dynamics of the discord makes its resolution impossible. In turn, attempting to implement the Riyadh Agreement without dealing with the underlying causes of the STC-Hadi government rivalry will only complicate the situation. The defeat of Hadi's forces and their expulsion from Aden in 2019 served to defuse longstanding tensions in the city. Bringing them back, refilling the powder keg, no matter how clever the redeployment plans are, will risk a much worse bloodshed than happened last year – remember 1986.

Still, successful implementation of the Riyadh Agreement is seen as a prerequisite for progress toward negotiations for a nationwide cessation of hostilities. In reality, the best option to halt the current violence and maintain a fragile peace would be a

[12] The war of 1994 was an unprecedented opportunity for Saleh to consolidate power and put down opposition under the banner of "defending unity". For decades after that enormous gain, Saleh made sure to keep the South seething with discontent so as to use it to consolidate power again when needed. When the opposition Joint Meeting Of Parties (JMP) dared to challenge him in 2006 by fielding a presidential candidate, he began to activate the defense of unity plan by committing provocations in the south, including the targeted killing of activists and giving southern landmarks to cronies. He frequently called Southern Movement commanders to dare them to declare armed resistance. In 2007, Saed Shatour, an Abyan native that was serving under Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar's command in Sa'ada, declared an armed resistance in Al-Mahfad, Abyan. Shatour and loyalists killed a few soldiers and blocked the road a few times, but Southern Movement leaders resisted his attempts to derail their peaceful protests. Many believed that Shatour's actions were instigated by Saleh and Mohsen.

modified version of the accord. On the security front, it could stipulate that the forces from each side stay in place and apart, with a token police force in Aden. STC-aligned forces could still be integrated onto the payroll of the government, addressing a major grievance of the group related to funding. Meanwhile, to avoid tensions in Aden, the seat of government could be relocated to the more pro-government confines of Sayoun or Mukalla in Hadramawt, or Al-Ghaydah in Al-Mahra.

In this way, the struggle over southern Yemen would be temporarily defused. The underlying cause of the conflict in the South, meanwhile, could then be deferred to the national reconciliation effort that must take place after the war, in a similar manner to what needs to be done in with Houthi authorities in Sana'a at the national level.

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Violence in the South Spreads to Shabwa

East of Abyan, hostilities in Shabwa escalated between STC- and GoY-aligned forces against the backdrop of ongoing tribal disputes. Clashes erupted after the government's Special Security Forces (SSF), which are aligned with the Islah party, attempted to block the local STC leadership and tribes in Jerdan district from holding a meeting to discuss developments in the south. A member of Al-Dabab tribe was killed during the clashes, which involved the use of heavy weapons, prompting tribal forces to block the SSF from returning west to the governorate capital Ataq. Calm was restored through tribal mediation and the Sana'a Center confirmed an agreement was struck for the SSF to withdraw from Jerdan district, for each side to release captured soldiers and for the formation of a fact-finding committee.

The next day, further clashes erupted in Nissab district, between tribes and the SSF related to the killing in May of Talal al-Awlaqi, a soldier in the STC-aligned Shabwani Elite Forces. Local tribes had called for accountability and the SSF's departure from Nissab, with the STC declaring support for the Al-Areeq tribe. On June 12, Al-Areeq tribal forces, gunmen from tribes loyal to STC and some members of the Shabwani Elite Forces attacked and besieged SSF positions in Nissab city. STC-aligned forces took control of half of the city, including markets and government buildings. In response to the clashes, roads were cut and both sides rushed to bolster their forces, with the government's 21st Mechanized Brigade and other forces moving from Bayhan district toward Nissab and tribal and STC-aligned forces also mobilizing reinforcements toward the city. However, by June 20, clashes between the two sides had largely subsided in Nissab.

On the Houthi Front

Houthis Squash Tribal Uprising in Al-Bayda, Push into Marib from the South

In June, Houthi forces suppressed a challenge from local tribes in Al-Bayda. Tension had been rising in the strategic central governorate – which borders four northern and four southern governorates – since late April after Houthi forces killed a local woman during a raid. In response, Yasser al-Awadi, a local tribal sheikh and member of the General People's Congress (GPC), called on local tribes to band together, demand justice for the killing and expel Houthi supervisors. The Houthis had sent leaders to negotiate with the Al-Awad tribe in May while also continuing battles in Al-Bayda with pro-government forces that had pushed forward in the Qaniyah district along the border with Marib.^[13] As mediation efforts failed to quell the dispute, the Houthis dispatched additional troops to Ramdan al-Awad district at the end of May.^[14]

[13] Maged al-Madhaji, "Al-Bayda Governorate: Too Strategic to be Forgotten," The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 4, 2020, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/10137>

[14] "Al-Houthi pushes fighters to the borders of 'Al-Awad' in Al-Bayda in preparation for an armed confrontation with the tribes after mediation faltered [AR]," Al-Masdar Online, May 26, 2020, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/194045>

On June 17, Houthi forces moved against Al-Awad tribe, launching missiles and drones and clashing with tribal forces in Radman al-Awad.^[15] The fighting was short-lived, with the Houthis putting down the challenge in roughly 24 hours of clashes. The group seized the market and center of the district, along with Yasser al-Awadi's home, forcing him to flee to neighboring Marib.^[16] According to Sana'a Center sources in Al-Bayda, the uprising failed in part due to a lack of military planning and to dissent within the tribe, with some elements that were dissatisfied with Yasser al-Awadi's administration of the tribe in the past using the opportunity to double cross him.

The tribal uprising in Al-Bayda also suffered from a lack of support from the Yemeni government and the Saudi-led coalition. This had been a factor in previous failed tribal uprisings against the Houthis.^[17] The Hajjur tribe had risen up against the Houthis in February 2019, and despite the Yemeni government saying that it would send forces to bolster the tribal forces in Hajjah governorate, the Houthis managed to quell the challenge, killing a Hajjur tribal elder and later carrying out a campaign of mass arrests in the governorate.^[18]

By the end of the month, Houthi forces claimed to have regained control of all of Ramdan al-Awad and the Qaniyah front to the north, including parts of neighboring Mahliyah and Al-Abidah districts in Marib and the main road connecting the two districts that had served as a key government supply line. Pro-Houthi media, citing Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea, reported that more than 400 square kilometers was captured by the group.¹⁸ According to a Sana'a Center observer in Marib, government and tribal forces were forced to retreat to Al-Abdiah district to the east while the Saudi-led coalition attempted to stem the Houthi advance with airstrikes.^[19]

Meanwhile, fighting also increased in the northwest of the governorate, with Houthi forces attacking government positions on Mount Haylan in the Serwah front, and battles also continuing in Majzar district as well as in Al-Jadaan, to the north of Serwah.^[20]

On June 29, forces affiliated with the Islah party carried out a raid in A-Khashaa, Wadi Ubaida, Marib city, that resulted in the death of seven members of the Sabaian family, including women. Local tribes denounced the massacre of the Sabaian family and affirmed the need to take revenge for the family.^[21] The Yemeni government's minister of human rights called on the Ministry of Defense to investigate the crime.^[22]

[15] Saeed al-Batati, "Yemeni tribes in Al-Bayda province revolt against Houthis," Arab News, June 18, 2020,

[16] "Al-Awadi house, the market and the center of the district are in the hands of the militias ... the latest field developments for the Al-Bayda battles between the Houthis and the Al-Awad family [AR]," Al-Mashhad al-Yemeni, June 18, 2020,

[17] "'The Northern Front', in 'War's Elusive End – The 2019 Yemen Annual Review,'" The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, January 30, 2020, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8923#The-Northern-Front>

[18] Toh Toh, Twitter post, "Yemeni Armed Forces spokesman Yahya Saria announces...", June 29, 2020, <https://twitter.com/tonytohcy/status/1277586967140560896>

[19] "30 killed as fighting continues between gov't forces, Houthis in central Yemen," Xinhua Net, June 22, 2020,

[20] "Yemen: A military commander and two of his companions were killed in battles with the Houthis in Marib [AR]," Xinhua Net Arabic, June 23, 2020,

[21] "The tribes of Murad, Al-Jadaan, Al-Ashraf, and Bani Dabyan condemn the crime of the Islah militia against the Subayyan family [AR]," Saba Net, June 30, 2020, <https://www.saba.ye/ar/news3101239.htm>

[22] "The Yemeni authorities recognize the massacre of Al-Subaian in Marib [AR]," Aden al-Hadath, July 6, 2020,

The Islah-affiliated forces reportedly moved against the Sabaian family under the pretense that it was spying for the Houthis.^[23]

Frontlines Active Across the Country

Fighting between Houthi and anti-Houthi forces flared on frontlines in multiple other governorates, including Al-Dhalea, Lahj and Taiz. Clashes in Al-Dhalea were mostly focused in the Al-Fakhir area in Qatabah district and along the Al-Azariq front on the border with neighboring Taiz governorate. In Lahj, STC-affiliated Southern Resistance forces attacked Houthi forces in Al-Hadd Yafa district on the border with Al-Bayda governorate. Houthi forces cut supply lines between Lahj and Al-Bayda, which had been used by the Saudi-led coalition's military command in Aden to provide military and financial support to Al-Bayda's local Popular Resistance. Fighting in Hadd al-Yafa centered around Al-Jamajim Mountain, which is currently held by Southern Resistance forces. Houthi forces, seeking to take advantage of the redeployment of STC-aligned forces to Abyan governorate, attacked the area with artillery and heavy weapons and seized some positions. In Qabaytah district in the west of the governorate, Houthi forces battled an alliance of Yemeni government forces affiliated with the Fourth Military District and the STC-affiliated Security Belt forces and Fifth Support and Backup Brigade.

Meanwhile, in Taiz, clashes involving shelling, gunfire and sniping occurred in Taiz city and in various other frontlines in the governorate. Intra-coalition tensions persisted in Al-Hujariah region between the Islah party, forces loyal to Tariq Saleh, and the General People's Congress branch affiliated with the Speaker of the Parliament, Sultan Al-Burkani.

Renewed Saudi-Houthi Air War

Multiple drone and missile attacks by the Houthi movement on Saudi territory in June harkened back to the regular cross-border strikes witnessed in 2019 before the two sides agreed in September to a cease-fire on aerial attacks. On June 16, Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea announced on Twitter that the group had carried out drone strikes against Khamis Mushait in southern Saudi Arabia,^[24] while the Saudi-led coalition said it had intercepted a ballistic missile fired toward Najran province.^[25] Later in the month, Sarea claimed that Houthi forces had targeted a Saudi Ministry of Defense building, the King Salman air base and an intelligence building in Riyadh on June 22. Coalition spokesperson Turki al-Malki announced Saudi air defenses had intercepted a ballistic missile fired toward the Saudi capital.^[26]

<https://aden-alhadath.info/amp/77493>

[23] "The tribes of Al-Tawq and Al-Munif Ubaida hold an important meeting to discuss the issue of the Sabaian family [AR]," Marib Today, July 2, 2020, <https://marebtoday.net/2020/07/02/35935/>

[24] Yahya al-Sarea, Twitter post, "By the grace of God and his generosity the Air Force conducts a massive operation..." June 16, 2020,

[25] "Violence surges in Yemen after coronavirus truce expires," Reuters, June 16, 2020,

[26] "Saudi Arabia says it intercepts Yemen rebel drones, missiles," The Associated Press, June 23, 2020,

Inside Yemen, the Saudi-led coalition also continued its campaign of aerial bombardment. Saudi-owned Al Arabiya reported that a high-ranking Houthi commander in charge of the movement's explosive drone production was likely killed in airstrikes on the Nehm front in eastern Sana'a governorate along the border with Marib. The Houthis had acknowledged the death of Mohammed Abdo Musleh al-Ghoulī on June 14, but did not provide any details on how or where he had been killed.^[27] On June 16, at least five airstrikes were carried out in the capital Sana'a. A day earlier, the Houthis said a strike against a civilian vehicle in Sa'ada had killed 13 people, including four children, though the Saudi-led coalition denied the report.^[28]

[27] "Iran-trained Houthi militant leader in charge of drones killed east of Sanaa," Al Arabiya, June 15, 2020,

[28] "Saudi-led coalition in Yemen denies killing civilians in Saada air strike," Reuters, June 17, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/saudi-led-coalition-in-yemen-denies-killing-civilians-in-saada-air-strike-idUSKBN25O2U2>

THE HOUTHIS FROM THE SA'ADA WARS TO THE SAUDI-LED INTERVENTION

Commentary by Maysaa Shuja al-Deen

The Houthis, a religious Zaidi movement that is limited to Yemen, have expanded their rhetoric to more closely reflect ideas espoused by Iran and other Shia Islamist movements in the so-called 'Axis of Resistance', yet the group's nature remains highly local, based on ancestral and territorial history. One cannot easily join the core Houthi movement because it does not trust anyone who joined after it expanded beyond Sa'ada and became the ruling power in Sana'a. Relations between the movement's members are based on absolute loyalty to the leadership and complete faith in the inevitability of reaching the movement's goals. The group's faith in its own purity has led to a sense of superiority over others and distrust of outsiders.

Understanding the Houthis requires distinguishing between their true internal rhetoric versus the actions and words directed at non-members. The group's coherence and unity has formed the basis for its existence and has served to protect it against outsiders, whether foreign powers or fellow Yemenis. Even now, while governing in Sana'a and controlling the majority of Yemen's population, the actions of the group remain influenced by the feeling that there always lurks a threat to the movement's existence.

The full commentary by Sana'a Center Non-Resident Fellow [Maysaa Shuja al-Deen](#) can be read [here](#).



Traffic is gridlocked to a standstill as vehicles cue for fuel amid apparent shortages in Sana'a, June 22, 2020 // Sana'a Center photo by Asem Alposi

Economic Developments

Another Stage-Managed Fuel Crisis in Northern Yemen

The images are familiar by now: Yemenis in Houthi-controlled territory queue at fuel stations, amid announced shortages. Meanwhile, fuel tankers build up in the Coalition Holding Area (CHA), located in international waters in the Red Sea offshore of Jizan, Saudi Arabia. The number of ships awaiting approval from the government and the Saudi-led coalition to proceed to Houthi-controlled Hudaydah port reaches the proportions of a small flotilla. Combined, these images would seem to tell a simple and compelling story: the Saudi-led coalition and Yemeni government are preventing fuel from entering Hudaydah to spite the Houthis, and ordinary Yemenis are paying the cost.

Yet the reality is much murkier. The truth is that the government and the Houthis are both guilty of participating in a self-interested tug of war to control fuel imports through Hudaydah, with little concern for the human cost of the disruption. This time around the Yemeni government, supported by the coalition, suspended approvals for fuel imports to dock and unload at Hudaydah throughout June. The Houthis, meanwhile, exploited the halt in fuel imports for political propaganda purposes and economic gain. By framing the fuel crisis as a symptom of foreign aggression that is exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation, the group attempted to absolve itself of any responsibility while cynically controlling the supply of fuel to market, driving up prices, and, by extension, Houthi revenues.

Origins of the Latest Fuel Standoff

Currently, all fuel import shipments headed to Houthi-controlled Hudaydah port must pass through the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) in Djibouti. Once cleared, they then proceed to the CHA for a security check by the Saudi-led coalition. Before receiving authorization to proceed to Hudaydah port, vessels must receive final approval from the government's Technical Office of the Supreme Economic Council, which checks that importers have submitted the necessary paperwork, in accordance with government fuel import regulations. In June, however, the Yemeni government suspended permission for fuel tankers to exit the CHA and dock at Hudaydah port. The last fuel shipment to arrive at the port prior to this was aboard the *Alejandrina* on May 31, carrying 8,400 metric tons (MT) of fuel oil. As of June 30, a total of 20 vessels carrying a combined 500,000 MT of fuel were in the CHA.^[29]

The Yemeni government made the move after becoming suspicious that the Houthis had withdrawn up to 45 billion Yemeni rials (YR) from a 'special account' at the Central Bank of Yemen's (CBY) Hudaydah branch, and misappropriated the funds by channeling them to the group's war effort.^[30] The account contained months of fuel import taxes and customs fees which, per an agreement that the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY) brokered in November 2019 between the Houthis and the government, would be earmarked to pay public sector employees in Houthi-controlled areas.^[31] The mechanism was essentially a scaled-down version of an unrealized aspect of the Stockholm Agreement, in which the parties had agreed that revenues from Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Issa ports would be deposited at CBY Hudaydah and used toward the payment of public sector salaries.^[32]

The November fuel import mechanism was intended to prevent future disruptions to fuel imports entering through Hudaydah, which then get distributed in Houthi-controlled territories, following multiple fuel crises in 2019.^[33] In March and April last year, there was a significant buildup of vessels in the CHA and a disruption to the domestic fuel market after the Houthis allegedly urged importers not to comply with the government's Decree 75, which outlined regulations that must be met for obtaining permission to import fuel into Yemen. Traders who wished to import via Hudaydah port already had to obtain authorization from the Houthi-run Yemen Petroleum Company (YPC) and agree to hand over the fuel to the YPC, the sole authorized fuel distributor in Houthi-controlled territory. As a sweetener, the Houthis offered to cover demurrage costs for vessels delayed from docking at the port, according to

[29] Data from MarineTraffic, June 2020, <https://www.marinetraffic.com/en/ais/home/centerx:43.6/centery:17.2/zoom:7>

[30] Sana'a Center interviews with government and UN officials in May and June 2020; Supreme Economic Council statement published via Economic Committee Facebook page, June 11, 2020, https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=596212821007976&id=272799003349361

[31] Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, "War's Elusive End – The Yemen Annual Review 2019," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, January 30, 2020, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8923#UN-Steps-Into-Coordinate-Port-Access-Issues-but-Revenue-Dispute-Remains>.

[32] Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, "Starvation, Diplomacy and Ruthless Friends: The Yemen Annual Review 2018," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, January 22, 2019, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/6808#DCM-The-Stockholm-Agreement>.

[33] Ibid.

several fuel traders who spoke with the Sana'a Center at the time. The same standoff played out again in September last year, this time in reaction to the government's Decree 49, which obligated all fuel importers to pay fuel import taxes and customs to the government in order to import fuel into Yemen, in addition to allowing for fuel quality control checks.

Funds in the CBY Hudaydah special account were supposed to be left untouched until the two sides agreed upon the list of public sector employees to be paid and which side would make up any difference in the amount needed to cover the salary payments. On April 16, the Houthi-run Supreme Economic Committee issued a statement saying that the OSESGY mechanism had expired and that it would use revenues accumulated up until March 31 to unilaterally start paying an undisclosed number of public sector employees in Houthi-controlled territories half salaries, though as of the end of June there was little indication that these payments had been made.^[34]

Evidence that the funds were withdrawn and used for Houthi military campaigns is circumstantial. According to government officials, per the terms of the November 2019 agreement, the Houthis agreed to provide regular bank statements to OSESGY, which would then be conveyed to the Yemeni government, proving that the fuel and tax customs revenues remained in the CBY Hudaydah special account.^[35] Government officials told the Sana'a Center that they have not seen any bank statements since early February, speculating that the Houthis withdrew the funds to help finance the group's military campaign and the territorial gains made in 2020.^[36]

OSESGY has tried to kickstart talks over a reconfigured version of the fuel import mechanism but the government has been reluctant to enter discussions until the Houthis confirm or return the YR45 billion to the special account.^[37] Government officials also told the Sana'a Center that it may again attempt to implement Decree 49, requiring fuel import taxes and customs fees be paid directly to the government rather than deposited in the special account at CBY Hudaydah, with the revenue to then be used to pay public sector employees in Houthi-controlled territory.^[38] The government attempted a similar move in August last year, leading to a standoff the following month in which the government eventually backed down.

It is unclear how the same approach from the government would prove any more successful now. Importers will still need authorization from the Houthi-run YPC to enter and unload at Hudaydah port, and the Houthi authorities having demonstrated their willingness to hold up fuel deliveries and risk shortages to thwart the Yemeni government's attempts to regulate fuel imports. The YPC's leverage is rooted in the fact that Houthi-controlled territory, where the majority of Yemen's population lives, represents the country's biggest domestic fuel market where the most profit can be made.

[34] Yemeni Press Agency, "Important Statement from the Supreme Economic Committee Regarding the Payment of Salaries of State Employees," Yemeni Press Agency, April 16, 2020, <http://www.yagency.net/252865>

[35] Sana'a Center interviews with government officials in May and June 2020.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

While suspending imports through Hudaydah in June 2020, the government granted approval for fuel traders to import fuel via Mukalla instead. From Mukalla port, the fuel is trucked overland to Houthi-controlled territory, a substitute trade and supply route used during past disruptions to fuel imports via Hudaydah. The government also sanctioned additional fuel imports via Aden port.

Never Let a Good Crisis Go to Waste

In the run-up to and immediately after the arrival of the last fuel shipment to Hudaydah in May, the Houthis started to sound the alarm on acute fuel shortages in their areas.^[39] They warned that the suspension of import activity and accompanying fuel shortages harmed the group's ability to combat the spread of COVID-19 in Yemen. In a June 6 letter to United Nations Resident Coordinator for Yemen Lise Grande, the Houthis argued that blocking fuel tankers from entering Hudaydah had a considerable negative impact on the humanitarian situation in Yemen, with the lack of fuel directly affecting hospitals, and health, hygiene and water sectors in general. This argument was echoed in a Houthi-run YPC circular on June 9.^[40]

Houthi authorities' statements on the ramifications of acute shortages are worrying, given the scale of Yemen's humanitarian and economic crises. External actors like the UN and international humanitarian organizations have a duty of care that shapes a collective effort to protect the population at large as much as possible. Prolonged fuel shortages in northern Yemen have significant humanitarian implications, including on the implementation of humanitarian operations and the transportation of food and water, given how fuel prices are a major contributing factor behind the rise in food prices during the conflict.^[41]

During June, long lines formed outside fuel stations in Houthi-controlled territories.^[42] While the image of vehicles queuing up in Houthi territories implies one story, import data tells a different one, bringing into question the speed at which the fuel crisis escalated. The temporary suspension of fuel imports into Hudaydah on a number of occasions aside, fuel has continued to flow fairly consistently through the port.^[43] Over the 12-month-period from June 2019 until May 2020, fuel imports into Hudaydah averaged 195,000 MT.^[44] In January and February, imports amounted to 170,000 and 188,000 MT, respectively, with imports then jumping in March, April

[39] Sana'a Center interviews with UN officials in May and June 2020; pro-Houthi Telegram channels, June 2020.

[40] Per copies of the letter to Lise Grande and the circular issues by the Houthi-run YPC obtained by the Sana'a Center in June 2020; Houthi-run Yemen Petroleum Company (YPC) Facebook, June 9, 2020, https://facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=3392298864114660&id=321250264552884

[41] Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), "Looming Fuel Crisis is Threatening Food, Hospitals and Water," Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), June 25, 2020, <https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2020/looming-fuel-crisis-is-threatening-food-hospitals-and-water/>

[42] Ibid; Sana'a Center interviews with residents in Hudaydah and Sana'a in June 2020.

[43] Per fuel import data obtained and verified by the Sana'a Center in June 2020. These figures differ from UN commodity tracking data due to differences in calculation methods. Import data the Sana'a Center has used is based on the dates on which fuel tankers berth at Red Sea ports, whereas UNVIM import data is based on the dates on which ships sail from the ports, so there can be variations between the two sets.

[44] Ibid.

and May, to an estimated 237,000, 228,000 and 190,000 MT of fuel, respectively.^[45] The March 2020 figure represented a record monthly high arriving at Hudaydah port since the conflict began.^[46] This suggests that there may have been a surplus of fuel created in Houthi-controlled areas before the group issued the first shortage warnings in June.

The high fuel import levels in March and April coincided with a drop in global prices.^[47] March prices fell further in April, with Brent Crude and WTI Crude plummeting to \$26 and \$11 dollars per barrel respectively.^[48] According to Yemeni fuel traders, the time between an importer securing a fuel shipment from the United Arab Emirates, where a significant amount of fuel entering Hudaydah (and Yemen as a whole) comes from, and the vessel arriving at Hudaydah port is typically between 15 and 30 days, with the longer wait time often due to bureaucratic delays.^[49] Given this timeline, fuel arriving in late March through May was likely bought on the cheap, with the Houthi-run YPC likely banking on a windfall.

This bet looked to have backfired, however, as the drop in global fuel prices coincided with a drop in global demand.^[50] In Yemen, although incredibly difficult to accurately gauge, indicators suggest that demand also notably decreased from March onwards, a view shared by fuel traders who spoke with the Sana'a Center.^[51] This was likely linked to decreased mobility among sections of the population fearful of contracting COVID-19 as well as the decline in remittance flows from migrant workers in neighboring countries, namely Saudi Arabia, which has forced Yemenis to deal with reduced incomes and cut back on spending.^[52]

With a surge in fuel imports being met with a drop in demand, the Houthi-run YPC likely inadvertently clogged its own distribution pipeline. To avoid losing money as a result of the situation, the Houthis needed an increase in fuel prices.

Fuel Rationing and Higher Prices Leads to More Revenues for the Houthis

The government's decision to suspend fuel imports appears to have thrown the Houthis a lifeline on their bet on importing cheap fuel, allowing the group to create

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Sana'a Center interviews with three Yemeni fuel traders on June 25, 2020.

[48] Alex Longley, Javier Blas, and Jacqueline Davalos, "Oil's 24% Plunge in a Day Signals No End in Sight for Meltdown," Bloomberg, March 18, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-17/oil-extends-slump-as-virus-spread-threatens-global-recession>; Tsvetana Paraskova, "U.S. Oil Prices Fall To \$11 Per Barrel In Historic Crash," Oilprice.com, April 20, 2020, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Oil-Prices/US-Oil-Prices-Fall-To-11-Per-Barrel-In-Historic-Crash.html>.

[49] Sana'a Center interviews with three Yemeni fuel traders on June 25 and 30, and July 1, 2020.

[50] Sana'a Center interviews with three Yemeni fuel traders on June 25, 2020.

[51] Sana'a Center interviews with three Yemeni fuel traders on June 25 and 30, and July 1, 2020.

[52] Iona Craig, "In Yemen, Families Suffer as COVID-19 Dries up Money from Abroad," The New Humanitarian, June 16, 2020, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/06/16/Coronavirus-Yemen-economy-remittances>.

the public perception of shortages and justify fuel rationing, in turn increasing market prices and allowing the group to recoup more revenues. The Houthi-run YPC instituted a quota system on June 10, with strict time restrictions dictating what times citizens can queue up and purchase up to 40 liters of fuel based on their vehicle registration number, creating a sense of urgency and scarcity.^[53] The system was brought in before there were more obvious signs to suggest increased shortages. Three-day long queues were reported in Hudaydah during the third week of June, with the price of fuel at YR17,000 per 20 liters, compared to YR5,000 at the end of May.^[54] The fuel price hikes that occurred in Houthi-controlled territories parallel to the buildup of vessels in the CHA also presumably helped the Houthi-run YPC to cover rising demurrage costs.

Evidence for the Houthi objective of limiting the overall amount of fuel available for purchase is also bolstered by the fact that fuel trucks were being denied entry into Houthi-controlled territory. During a June 20 televised telephone interview with Houthi-run YPC spokesperson Ameen al-Shubaiti, Yemeni journalist Abdulhafidh Mougeb asked Al-Shubaiti about why the YPC was restricting the movement of fuel trucks. Mougeb cited up to 60 trucks held in Al-Jawf, 100 trucks in Affar, Al-Bayda, 50 trucks in Taiz and 50 trucks in Hudaydah. Using the reported figures that Mougeb presented to the Houthi-run YPC spokesperson, the 260 trucks would be carrying more than 50,000 barrels of fuel. On June 26, an estimated 44 fuel trucks were shown in a video circulated on social media idling outside the group's territory in an area close to the borders between Al-Jawf, Marib and Sana'a governorates.^[55] Per local sources the Sana'a Center spoke with, the trucks in Taiz were stopped near Al-Rahidah. In Hudaydah, trucks were being forced to idle near Houthi-held Bayt al-Faqih.^[56]

On June 22, the government accused the Houthis of denying more than 150 fuel trucks entry into Houthi-controlled territories and threatening truck drivers and fuel traders.^[57] It also denounced such actions as a clear illustration of the Houthis' rejection of government attempts to lessen the impact of the disruption to Hudaydah fuel imports on the broader population.^[58]

While it is notable that the Houthis did not precipitate this current standoff over fuel imports, their actions appear to be taken from a playbook they developed during past episodes: shortages are accompanied by price hikes and well-coordinated advocacy campaigns aimed at the UN and other international actors.^[59]

[53] Houthi-run Yemen Petroleum Company (YPC) Facebook Page, June 09, 2020, https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=3392298864114660&id=32125026452884

[54] Sana'a Center interviews with a Yemen fuel market expert and Hudaydah resident on June 22, 2020.

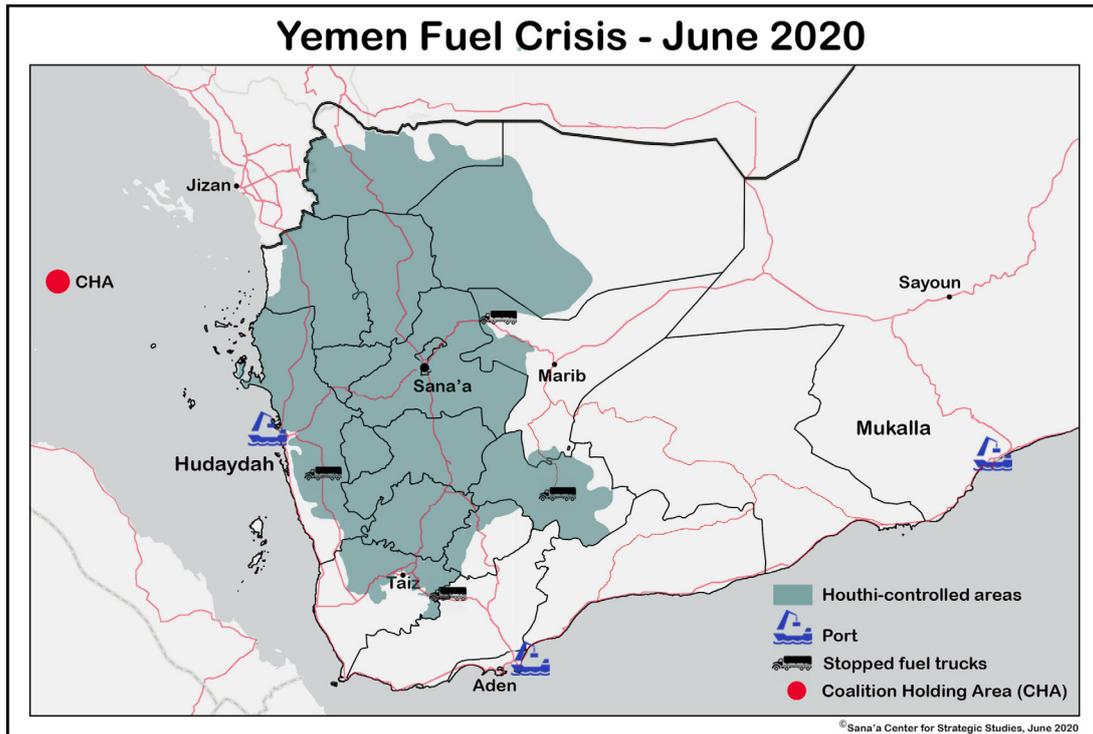
[55] Mohammed al-Dhabyani (@maldhabyani), June 27, 2020, <https://twitter.com/maldhabyani/status/1276628720829136896>.

[56] Sana'a Center interviews with local sources in Yemen and a Yemen fuel expert on July 3 and 5, 2020.

[57] Economic Committee Facebook Page, June 22, 2020, <https://facebook.com/economiccommittee/photos/a.273096309986297/602568340372424/?type=3&source=57>

[58] Ibid.

[59] Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, "War's Elusive End – The Yemen Annual Review 2019," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, January 30, 2020, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8923#New-Rules-a-New-Ban-and-a-New-Crisis>



During the September 2019 standoff, the price of fuel in Sana'a climbed to YR20,000 per 20 liters from YR7,300 the previous month, a 239 percent increase.^[60] The four preceding months saw a spike in fuel import activity, with 800,000 MT coming in via Hudaydah, compared to 630,000 MT during the first four months of 2019.^[61] The import data raises the possibility that the Houthis stockpiled fuel in anticipation for a planned disruption. The supply of Marib Light crude produced at Block-18 in Marib and refined locally is another factor that helps the Houthis to mitigate the impact of any disruption to Hudaydah fuel imports.

When prices went up in September 2019 during the onset of the standoff, Houthi authorities increasingly lobbied UN agencies, INGOs and humanitarian organizations to put pressure on the government and the Saudi-led coalition to allow fuel to enter Hudaydah, with the larger objective likely being to get the government to back down from implementing Decree 75 and Decree 49.^[62] The strategy paid off. At the beginning of October 2019, the government and the coalition issued a waiver to a number of vessels that were allowed to proceed from the CHA to Hudaydah without having fulfilled the decree requirements.^[63] OSESGY mediation efforts also paved the way for the Hudaydah fuel import mechanism that was agreed in November, a catalyst of the current standoff.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Per fuel import data obtained and verified by the Sana'a Center in June 2020.

[62] Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, "War's Elusive End – The Yemen Annual Review 2019," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, January 30, 2020, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8923#New-Rules-a-New-Ban-and-a-New-Crisis>

[63] Ibid.

Without Accountability, the Next Fuel Crisis Awaits

The ongoing saga over fuel imports in Yemen represents one front in the warring parties' reckless economic warfare, which has had an immensely destabilizing effect on the country's economy and served to exacerbate the humanitarian situation.

The government's Decree 75 and Decree 49, while ostensibly fuel import regulations, are in the current context weaponized in support of the government's greater war aims. The Houthi authorities' response has similarly arisen to protect financial and political dimensions of the group's wider military pursuits. The mandate of UN agencies, INGOs and aid organizations prioritizes immediate humanitarian need for fuel, but the lobbying of the Yemeni government and the Saudi-led coalition to release fuel tankers held in the CHO has essentially aided the Houthi side in the fuel standoff.

At the same time, international organizations have not called out the Houthi authorities for the latter's role in stage managing and profiteering from fuel crises in northern areas. According to one fuel trader who spoke with the Sana'a Center, the Houthis have warned importers against sailing their tankers out of the CHA or seeking to break their contracts with the YPC and sell the fuel elsewhere. The Houthi authorities backed up these warnings with threats to deny importers future permission to distribute fuel in Yemen's northern areas, the country's most lucrative market.^[64]

The longer such standoffs persist and are framed as the cause of a fuel crisis in Houthi-control areas, the higher the likelihood the UN and international pressure will again come to bear on the Yemeni government and the coalition to stand down, again undermining the government's attempts to assert authority over fuel imports. This appears to be playing out again.

On July 2, the Technical Office of the Supreme Economic Council announced that it would award import licenses to four shipments carrying a total of 92,000 MT tons of various fuels to Hudaydah: one carrying 29,000 MT of petrol, one with 28,000 MT of diesel, another carrying 27,000 MT of mazout, and one vessel carrying 8,000 MT of liquified petroleum gas (LPG).^[65] The government authorized the deliveries in response to a request made by the UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, who met with government officials in Riyadh on June 30.^[66] Thirteen out of the 20 vessels idling during June, carrying a combined total of 338,000 MT, had submitted fuel import applications to the OSESGY in June to be passed on for approval to the government-run Technical Office. The four vessels that the government authorized to proceed to Hudaydah Port were among the applications submitted.

While a deescalation of the standoff is a positive outcome for Yemenis at large, a resolution without accountability placed on both sides for their roles in the disruption and the stage-managed fuel shortage almost certainly ensures that Yemen's next fuel crisis is just around the corner.

[64] Sana'a Center interview with a Yemeni fuel trader on June 30, 2020.

[65] Supreme Economic Council statement published via Economic Committee Facebook page, July 02, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/272799003349361/posts/608741089755149/>

[66] Supreme Economic Council Twitter account, July 20, 2020, <https://twitter.com/SECYemen1/status/1278767122727010310>; OSESGY Twitter account, June 30, https://twitter.com/OSE_Yemen/status/1277966722209705991

Other Economic Developments:

Houthi Institute Tax to Benefit Group's Leaders and Loyalists

A controversial new decree by Houthi authorities in Sana'a channels tax revenues to a small segment of loyalists, a move critics have decried as discriminatory. On April 29, President of the Houthi-run Supreme Political Council Mehdi al-Mashat signed an executive bylaw that imposes a 20 percent tax on all economic activity involving natural resources, which is anticipated to target most prominently the country's oil, gas and fishing industries.^[67] However, Yemeni outlet Al-Masdar reported that the group had been informally imposing the levy for at least five months, citing its use against sand and gravel crushers, water companies and even chicken farms.^[68]

Houthi authorities characterized the new regulations as an expansion of the 1999 Zakat law, the Islamic religious obligation that is intended as charitable almsgiving to underprivileged groups. Based on the new interpretation, revenues from the tax would go directly to the Ahl al-Bayt, descendants of the Prophet Mohammed, which includes the Al-Houthi family and Yemen's Hashemites, made up largely of Houthi loyalists. The move harkens back to the pre-republic Yemeni Imamate, where the ruling dynasty and other Hashemite families enjoyed special privileges and were considered above the rest of society. It also fits with Houthi ideology, which advocates the Ahl al-Bayt have a divine right to rule.^[69]

The new Zakat regulations drew fierce criticism on social media and from the Yemeni government. Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalek Saeed accused the Houthis of fracturing Yemeni society and rejecting the values of equal citizenship enshrined in the republic's constitution, saying in a tweet that the new law was based on "hereditary discrimination and racism."^[70]

STC Seizes Newly-Printed Yemeni Rials

The STC-run Supreme Economic Committee announced June 13 that it would prevent the government-run Aden central bank from feeding any newly-printed banknotes into the market, in view of protecting the value of the Yemeni rial in Aden against further depreciation.^[71] On the same day, STC-allied forces intercepted seven containers that had an estimated YR60 billion newly-printed banknotes inside, the

[67] "Houthis reinterpret religious tax to steer more funds to Hashemites," Al-Masdar Online, June 9, 2020, <https://al-masdaronline.net/national/894>

[68] "Houthis have been charging controversial Hashemite tax for months," Al-Masdar Online, June 12, 2020, <https://al-masdaronline.net/national/912>

[69] Maysaa Shuja al-Deen, "The Houthis: From the Sa'ada Wars to the Saudi-led Intervention," The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 16, 2020, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/10205>

[70] Maeen Abdelmalek Saeed Twitter account, June 8, 2020, "The Houthi publication of what they called the Zakat law..," <https://twitter.com/DrMaeenSaeed/status/1270060958996746250>

[71] Supreme Economic Committee, "The Supreme Economic Committee of the Southern Self-Administration issues an important statement on the reservation of printed banknotes," Southern Transitional Council, June 13, 2020, <https://stcaden.com/news/12129>.

equivalent of almost US\$80 million.^[72] The STC's actions came as part of ongoing efforts to manage the local economy in Aden following the declaration of self-rule in late April 2020.

According to one Aden-based banking official, the newly-printed banknotes that the STC intercepted did not have a serial number on them and so would not have been fed immediately onto the market.^[73] The normal practice would be for the notes to be stored at the Aden central bank and then when the bank is ready to issue the new notes a serial number is added. The timing of the STC's actions were also significant as they seemed to occur during a period in which the Saudi-led mediation efforts between the STC and the government had been temporarily suspended

On June 30, Saudi-led coalition forces intercepted a separate batch of newly-printed Yemeni rial banknotes at Mukalla port before transporting the notes to the local central bank branch in the city.^[74] According to one government official that the Sana'a Center spoke with, the undisclosed amount of Yemeni rial banknotes is currently under the watchful eye of coalition forces at the central bank in Mukalla.^[75]

For more information on the economic implications of the STC's latest powerplay in Aden and what it means for the government-run Aden central bank, see: Yemen Economic Bulletin: STC's Aden Takeover Cripples Central Bank and Fragments Public Finances.^[76]

[72] Sputnik, "The Yemeni government accuses the southern "transitional" of theft of money containers belonging to the Central Bank," Sputnik, June 13, 2020, https://arabic.sputniknews.com/arab_world/202006131045702461-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B4%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D9%83-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%80%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA/.

[73] Sana'a Center interview with an Aden-based banking official on June 16, 2020.

[74] Sana'a Center interview with a government official on July 02, 2020.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, "Yemen Economic Bulletin: STC's Aden Takeover Cripples Central Bank and Fragments Public Finances," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 17, 2020, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/10219>.



Yemenis in Sana'a were in the clutches of both a fuel crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic last month (pictured here on June 15, 2020) // Sana'a Center photo by Asem Alposi

The COVID-19 Pandemic

As the Virus Advances, Yemenis Adjust to New Realities

COVID-19 continued to spread rapidly across Yemen at the end of June, UNOCHA reported, although a severe lack of testing and under-reporting meant figures for confirmed cases and deaths remained low.^[77] By the end of June, just 3,508 COVID-19 tests had been carried out in Yemen, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported, but this figure did not include positive test results from Houthi-controlled areas as Houthi authorities only report negative test results.^[78] The armed Houthi movement is not disclosing the number of cases or deaths in territory it controls. The internationally recognized Yemeni government reported 818 cases and 173 deaths in areas it nominally controls in June.^[79] By July 5, a total of 1,252 cases of COVID-19 and 338 deaths had been announced in Yemen, the WHO reported.^[80]

Modeling published in June by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Studies projected that the unmitigated spread of COVID-19 in Yemen could lead to 7.7 million to 11 million symptomatic cases and 58,000 to 84,000 deaths after six months.^[81] The

[77] "Yemen COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Snapshot – As of 27 June 2020," OCHA, June 29, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-covid-19-preparedness-and-response-snapshot-27-june-2020-enar>

[78] "Yemen: COVID-19 Epidemiological dashboard," World Health Organization, Accessed July 6, 2020, <https://app.powerbi.com>

[79] Health Emergency Dashboard – Yemen," World Health Organization, Accessed July 6, 2020, <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/ye>

[80] Ibid.

[81] "Projections of COVID-19 epidemics in LMIC," Centre for Mathematical Modelling of Infectious Diseases, June 5, 2020, <https://cmmid.github.io/topics/covid19/LMIC-projection-reports.html>

study projected demand for critical care would peak roughly four months from the start of transmission, when between 24,000 and 44,000 people would require critical care. At the end of June, Yemen had just 710 intensive care beds, 380 ventilators and 25 operational isolation units.^[82]

The Sana'a Center spoke in June with Yemenis from across the country about what it is like to live through a pandemic in a war-torn country with a shattered health system. Their responses have been edited for clarity.

Athar Ali Mohammed Yahya is a civil society leader in Aden and director of planning and development at Alf Ba Civilization and Coexistence Foundation. Deaths in Aden surged in May due to COVID-19 and other infectious diseases that spread in the wake of heavy flooding in the city.^[83] Several hospitals, unprepared to deal with the pandemic, simply closed as cemeteries overflowed. Yahya said that life in Aden at that time was especially grim, but described a city learning to live with a new threat.



Personally, look, in May, we went through very difficult circumstances in Aden, and I was feeling down because all we heard of during this phase, which was also during Ramadan, was about deaths: 'our neighbor died,' 'a colleague died,' 'a relative died,' 'one of my parents died,' and so forth. There was death every day. They were tragic circumstances, and we felt that everyone abandoned us during that period: the warring political factions, the Southern Transitional Council, [President] Hadi's government, they were in conflict and they abandoned everything.

Now, people's awareness is better, and hygiene too. There are very large campaigns in Aden that have greatly contributed to decreasing deaths and infections. As for wearing the facemask, people before were not convinced there is COVID-19 in Aden. But now, people understand that it is here and that wearing the facemask lowers infection. This does not mean markets and places are not crowded, but there is awareness, people are even eating more healthily. They understand it is important to strengthen immunity. I now have hope, and I believe we have overcome the crisis, but of course by staying home as much as possible and abiding by precautionary measures.

As you know, working from home is a tragedy in a city where there isn't strong electricity or internet. This always affects work as it takes longer to finish work from home. On a personal level, there has been a positive and negative impact. What has been positive is that I see my family more, and I've had time to read more than before. What has been negative is that I realized I was not someone who likes to stay at home, and I have been at home for so long now.

[82] "Yemen COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Snapshot – As of 27 June 2020," OCHA, June 29, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-covid-19-preparedness-and-response-snapshot-27-june-2020-enar>

[83] "A Grave Road Ahead – The Yemen Review, May 2020," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 2, 2020, https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/10047#Medical_Sector_Struggles_to_Cope

In Yemen's other major southern port city Mukalla, in Hadramawt, English Literature professor Khaled Balkhasher said life started to return to normal in June. Yemen's first announced case of coronavirus was reported in Al-Shihr port in Hadramawt on April 10, leading to curfews and movement restrictions in the governorate. On June 10, Hadramawt governor Faraj al-Bahsani issued a decree banning non-Hadramis from entering the governorate as part of efforts to combat the spread of coronavirus. To enforce the measure, military posts were established at the borders with Shabwa and Marib governorates.^[84] As of June 27, Hadramawt had confirmed 310 cases and 122 deaths, the highest numbers in Yemen, although this may be in part attributable to its more proactive local authorities.^[85] Balkhasher, who teaches at Hadramawt University, described a city emerging from lockdown.



“Mukalla is a city where people gathered in cafes and other places. People were deprived of their lifestyle... Besides, the hot weather and humidity made life indoors unbearable. The power cuts that last 12 to 16 hours added salt to the wound.

But, now it has been okay. I can move in the city and practice my hobbies from dawn until 8pm. Things are back to normal, about 70 percent of the way. Starting about two weeks ago, cafes started opening again until 8pm. People have begun to live almost normally... The deaths are mostly due to other diseases, like dengue fever.

Still, at the beginning, this felt more difficult than anything we have faced in Mukalla in recent years. I lost some colleagues and friends. I felt for a moment that we could not face the pandemic with our very poor health system.

At the university, whether we will do online classes or resume classes indoors depends on the instructions from the Ministry of Higher Education. While there is an option to give lectures via Zoom, that is difficult because of our weak internet. Probably, we will either resume classes with social distancing or double the marks of the first round of exams to just end the academic year after classes were suspended in April.

In Yemen's capital, Sana'a, Houthi authorities reported four cases of COVID-19 in May; they have concealed all cases and deaths since then. Médecins Sans Frontières, which is supporting the main treatment center for COVID-19 in Sana'a, said in June that the 15-bed intensive care unit was consistently full and that the team there had witnessed a high rate of deaths.^[86] Dr. Nabil, who works at a public hospital in

[84] “Issuance of directives to prevent entry of people from other governorates to Hadramawt [AR],” Socotra Post, June 10, 2020, <https://socotrapost.com/localnews/3370>

[85] “Yemen COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Snapshot – As of 27 June 2020,” OCHA, June 29, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-covid-19-preparedness-and-response-snapshot-27-june-2020-enar>

[86] “‘COVID-19 has made the health system's collapse complete’ in Yemen,” Médecins Sans Frontières, June 10, 2020, <https://www.msf.org/covid-19-has-made-yemen-health-system-collapse-complete>

Sana'a, said medical staff were struggling to treat patients due to inadequate funds and resources. Yemen is facing an aid funding crisis and donations have fallen in part due to concerns over Houthi interference in aid distribution.^[87] Dr. Nabil said his hospital had received no support, but that staff continued to work out of duty toward their patients. The Sana'a Center is using a pseudonym for this doctor due to Houthi authorities' intimidation of doctors who discuss COVID-19 publicly.



“When we met with the [Houthi health] minister after Eid, we were told that there is no support from any organization [for our hospital], and that we were alone in dealing with this situation. In this period, [some hospital staff] have worked for free, without salaries. The hospital must function using only its own revenues. Imagine, there is no support from any organization or even from the ministry. There are not any ventilators in the intensive care unit, so work is really quite difficult. Most of the challenges we experience when facing a grave situation like coronavirus are because we have very little capacity to do anything... Despite all the difficulties we faced because of the war, with coronavirus it is more difficult because of the cuts in aid.

And yet, there is a group of hospital employees who continue to work because they swore an oath. Despite these harsh conditions, they will work and there is nothing that will stand in their way from doing so. They were trained how to treat coronavirus cases. Their spirits remain strong, even without any material support. For them, it's not possible to abandon the Yemeni people, and so, they give their all.

At Al-Thawrah Hospital in Taiz, a city that has experienced the brunt of the war between Houthi forces and fighters loyal to the internationally recognized government, Dr. Abdulrahim al-Samie spoke of the challenges of keeping employee morale lifted. Yemen suffers from a shortage of trained medical staff, and doctors have reported a high fatality rate among medics dealing with the pandemic.^[88] Dr. Al-Samie said spreading hope helped to galvanize his team, whether facing a war or a pandemic.



“For me, in comparing the challenges brought by the war with those brought by the coronavirus pandemic, the separation between these challenges is a small margin. It can be said, in the end, that both are war. There is an enemy and there are those who defend against an enemy. The big difference is that coronavirus is an unknown and invisible enemy. It's possible for it to attack at any time, and so the daily challenges against an invisible enemy

[87] Vivian Yee, “Yemen Aid Falls Short, Threatening Food and Health Programs,” New York Times, June 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/world/middleeast/yemen-saudi-united-nations-aid.html>

[88] Ali Mahmood, “Coronavirus rips through Sanaa prisons, Yemeni doctors say,” The National, June 10, 2020, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/coronavirus-rips-through-sanaa-prisons-yemeni-doctors-say-1.1031254>

almost bring more mental and physical pressure than war, and that's in addition to the daily grind of war.

Of course, there is hope. I am an optimistic person. I find hope through patience, through persevering, through expecting the best out of the future... especially as I am responsible for maintaining morale so that those under my administration stick together. I always try to give hope to those around me in order to preserve social cohesion. I try to use human and financial resources to invest what is available as much as possible. The challenges do not go away easily, and sometimes they accumulate, especially in this time of epidemic. Coronavirus accumulates and breeds, and each challenge gives birth to another, but our experience during the past six years made us insist on life. Insisting on life generates hope for tomorrow.

Environmental Developments

IN FOCUS: HOW WEAK URBAN PLANNING, CLIMATE CHANGE AND WAR ARE MAGNIFYING THE IMPACTS OF FLOODS AND NATURAL DISASTERS

By Yasmeeen Al-Eryani

This year, Yemen experienced a series of weather shocks as flash floods swept through 15 governorates across Yemen between March 24 and June 6, affecting some areas multiple times. Considering that 80 percent of the Yemeni population is in need of some form of humanitarian assistance and more than 3.6 million people are internally displaced,^[89] while public services and infrastructure have been laid bare during five long years of war, swathes of Yemen's population are vulnerable to the immediate and long-term impact of these floods. This comes in the midst of a global pandemic, a continuing war and cuts in international aid to Yemen.^[90]

The long-term impact of floods and natural disasters on the various sectors and overall GDP in Yemen are little understood, but some studies conducted following the 2008 Hadramawt floods indicate a lingering effect of such disasters on food security and household income. While agriculture is the sector worst hit by floods, others such as the service sector and food processing industries feel the shockwaves of such disasters.^[91] According to the Climate Investment Fund, the 2008 floods inflicted damage amounting to 6 percent of GDP.^[92]

Although rainfall in Yemen may be intense during its short spring and summer seasons, particularly in the Western highlands, an alarming change in weather patterns in the past decade has resulted in a higher frequency of flash floods and tropical cyclones, a novel weather phenomenon in Yemen. These are recurring in normally dry areas that received 50 mm of rainfall annually such as Hadramawt, Al-Mahra, Shabwa and Marib. In 2008, Hadramawt sustained long-term damage from floods that is still felt until today, according to Omar Shehab, the Director General of the Environmental Protection Authority in Hadramawt.^[93] In 2015, the first tropical

[89] "Yemen Situation Report", UNOCHA, June 2, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Yemen%20-%203%20Jun%202020%20%281%29.pdf>

[90] Vivian Yee, "Yemen Aid Falls Short, Threatening Food and Health Programs," New York Times, June 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/world/middleeast/yemen-saudi-united-nations-aid.html>

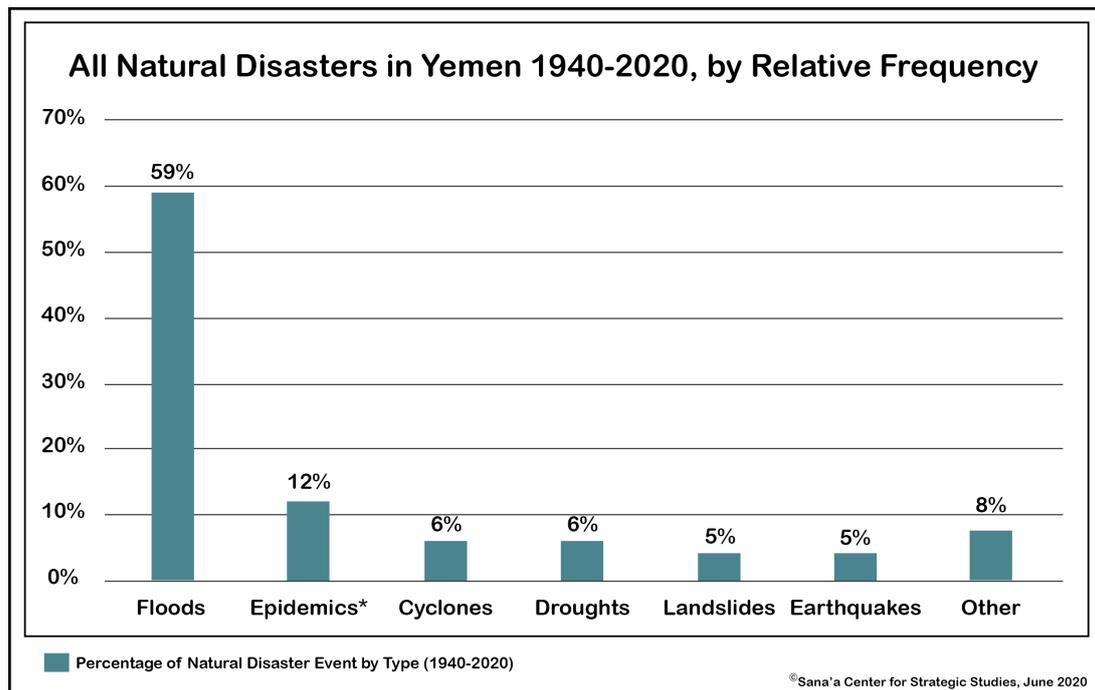
[91] Manfred Wiebelt; Clemens Breisinger; Olivier Ecker; Perrihan Al-Riffai; Richard D. Robertson, and Rainer Thiele, "Climate change and floods in Yemen: Impacts on food security and options for adaptation," International Food Policy Research Institute, IFPRI Discussion Paper 1139, Washington DC, 2011. <http://ebrary.ifpri.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15738coll2/id/126748>

[92] "Strategic Program for Climate Resilience for Yemen", Climate Investment Funds, April 30, 2012, <https://www.climateinvestmentfunds.org/country/yemen>

[93] Sana'a Center interview with Omar Shehab, Director General of the Environmental Protection Authority, June 23, 2020.

cyclone recorded since modern records began in the 1940s hit eastern governorates and the Socotra archipelago; two other cyclones occurred in 2018.

Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and more intense, bringing Yemen face-to-face with a looming climate change emergency. Yemen is ranked 167 among 181 countries on the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) index in 2017, which measures countries' vulnerability and readiness to face climate change.^[94] Floods constitute the highest recurring natural disaster in Yemen; 39 floods happened between 1972 and 2020, making it an almost yearly occurrence and sometimes multiple floods occurred in a single year.^[95]



Source data: EM-DAT, CRED / UCLouvain, Brussels, Belgium, www.emdat.be (D. Guha-Sapir), 2020-06-15; *Excluding COVID-19

Between March and June 2020, 150,000 people were affected by the floods, including 64,000 internally displaced people, and a further 7,000 became displaced within this period as a direct result of the floods.^[96] According to a UN source, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly, a network of local NGOs was mobilized including many volunteers to assess the damage and provide hygiene kits, food baskets and make-shift shelters to those who lost their homes. This was significantly hampered in April and June due to COVID-19 risks that restricted movement of humanitarian staff and aid. However, according to the UN source, “the biggest challenge is having a very weak national coordination body in the interim capital, Aden, that is absorbed in a political tit-for-tat.”

[94] Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN), 2017, <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/>

[95] The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, June, 2020, <https://public.emdat.be/data>

[96] “Emergency Plan of Action: Yemen”, The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, April 28, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDRYE009.pdf>

In ideal circumstances, the responsibility for rescue operations and disaster response coordination lies with the Civil Defense Authority, according to Yemen's Law 24 of 1997 on the Civil Defense.^[97] Fuad Ali, a UNDP Deputy Team Leader in the Economic Resilience and Recovery Team, said that civil defense received capacity building and support to respond to disasters prior to the war.^[98] However, a source in the Civil Defense Authority in Sana'a said that their current work has been reduced to firefighting and basic rescue operations. The civil defense official explained that the agency does not have the capacity or resources for the wide range of responsibilities stipulated in the law or set in its disaster response plan.^[99]

In Aden, the Civil Defense Authority has been almost stripped bare. According to the head of the Aden Civil Defense, Major General Mohammed Al-Shab'an, their offices were looted during the Houthi incursion in 2015. They now have no presence outside of Aden, are left with only a few firefighting vehicles and receive funds, often late, for operational costs that barely cover maintenance of vehicles and staff salaries. Al-Shab'an said no plan was in place to respond to the flooding disaster and there were no designated evacuation locations or capacity to evacuate people. "We tried our best given the limited resources available to us, such as driving our firefighting vehicles around the city to make public announcements for the residents to take the necessary precautions," Al-Shab'an said, adding that the floods in Aden were especially devastating because of unplanned urban development as buildings blocked and redirected the path of flood waters. Water flow was further obstructed by security roadblocks that riddle the city, especially around high-value buildings such as the Central Bank of Yemen.^[100]

Interviews with Aden residents convey some of what people experienced during these floods. Zahra'a Ali, 22, a sociology student and resident of Crater, one of the districts in Aden badly affected by the floods, described how the flood water picked up large rocks and debris as it carved its path through the mountains, becoming thick with garbage and mixing with an overflowing sewage system. In some areas, entrances to homes were blocked by a thick layer of silt carried by floodwater from the mountains, she said. The Al-Khesaf neighborhood, which houses marginalized communities in fragile tin houses, was essentially washed away. Crater's old system for rainwater drainage known as manahel was ineffective as newly constructed buildings blocked them and flood water that became trapped in neighborhoods quickly turned into foul swamp water.^[101]

According to another resident of Crater, Ayah al-Ebbi, 23, a student of laboratory sciences involved in community work, the flood response came primarily from youth activists, who appealed to local philanthropists to cover the high costs of vacuum trucks that drain water from residential areas. Al-Ebbi currently hosts her relatives who fled their home in April after losing all their furniture in the floods. She said that some local NGOs came to assess the damage and distribute hygiene kits and, while

[97] Yemen national law (24) on civil defense, April 6, 1997, https://yemen-nic.info/db/laws_ye/detail.php?ID=11524

[98] Sana'a Center interview with Fuad Ali, Deputy Team Leader of the Economic Resilience and Recovery Team, UNDP, June 21, 2020.

[99] Sana'a Center background interview, not for attribution, with an official in Civil Defense, Sana'a, June 23, 2020.

[100] Sana'a Center interview with Major General, Mohammed Al-Shab'an, Head of the Civil Defense Authority, Aden, June 22, 2020

[101] Sana'a Center interview with Zahra Ali, a resident of Crater, Aden, June 22, 2020

she praised local initiatives that swiftly mobilized in response to the calamity, she said the scale of the disaster required an official and coordinated response from the state. Nevertheless, Al-Ebbi said many residents were better prepared when floods occurred again on April 21, having sealed their homes, and immediately drained the water as it flowed.^[102]

While residents spoke of some district heads responding quickly with whatever means possible, a video circulating on social media two days after the second round of floods showed the acting governor of Aden, Ahmed Salmin Rabi', followed by residents in Crater demanding water and electricity and hurling obscenities at him.^[103]

Al-Mahra is another governorate that has suffered from floods and cyclones in recent years. "People of Al-Mahra remember with horror the cyclone of 2018," said Noor Makki, 28, a resident of governorate capital Al-Ghaydah who works at the Fisheries Authority, "so when meteorological warnings announced an atmospheric depression, we were on high alert and many people took shelter in the mountains." Makki said that while the rains were not as severe as they had initially anticipated, they did affect certain areas prone to flooding where internally displaced people (IDPs) and newcomers had settled.^[104] A similar situation devastated 3,500 IDP shelters in Marib governorate,^[105] where the largest displacement site, Al-Jufaina, is located.^[106] The Shelter Cluster, the inter-agency coordination body co-chaired by UNHCR and IOM and responsible for coordinating IDP shelter management and aid distribution, was unresponsive to multiple Sana'a Center requests for comment.

Building on flood courses is also a problem in Hadramawt, according to Dr. Khaled Bawahedi, an associate professor at the Faculty of Environmental and Marine Sciences in Hadramawt University. "The local government continues to tolerate the construction of houses on flood courses and valleys, with complete disregard to the risks this poses to the population — often to IDPs and poor communities. During this round of floods and also during previous floods, some communities were deprived of clean water — this is what happened in Al-Hajr, one of most badly hit areas in Hadramawt," he said. Bawahedi sees a clear link between these weather shocks and climate change, but said higher education institutions' resources to research and share knowledge on adaptation and mitigation are limited and official support is lacking for this type of work.^[107] Omar Shehab said the Environmental Protection Authority he leads in Hadramawt was shut down from 2013-2017, and that funding for research and even basic field data collection is non-existent.^[108]

[102] Sana'a Center interview with Ayah Al-Ebbi, a resident of Crater, Aden, June 22, 2020

[103] Azouz Jamal, Facebook, April 23, 2020 https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=3765275230181682&id=100000977258408

[104] Sana'a Center interview with Noor Makki, resident of Al-Ghaydah, Al-Mahra, June 22, 2020

[105] "Displacement in Marib", IOM-Yemen, April 22, 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/en_iom_yemen_displacement_in_marib_22_april_2020.pdf

[106] "Al Jufainah Camp, Marib City: Camp Profile", IOM-Yemen, February, 2020, https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/en_iom_yemen_jufainah_camp_marib_city.pdf

[107] Sana'a Center interview with Dr. Khaled Bawahedi, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Environmental and Marine Sciences, Hadramawt University, June 23, 2020

[108] Sana'a Center interview with Omar Shehab, Director General of the Environmental Protection Authority in Hadramawt, June 23, 2020.

In discussions with people from some of the affected governorates, one gets the impression that each operates in isolation; there is no sense that climate change-related disasters cross not only governorate lines but national and international borders. According to Anwar No'man, an environmental scientist who has been working on climate change in Yemen since 1996, Yemen is party to the main international environmental treaties and has taken some steps in adaptation and mitigation. In 2009 it developed a National Adaptation Program of Action and continued to submit periodic reports to the parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the latest of which was in June 2018. However, development and climate change projects were sidelined during the war as donors shifted their focus and funds to short-term humanitarian aid. "Climate change action is an emergency that requires long-term commitment," No'man said. When asked about whether communities are aware of climate change, he explained, "Farmers are becoming aware of a shift in seasons and rain pattern disruptions. They might not be aware of concepts such as climate change and global warming, but they understand from first-hand experience that nature is changing and it's causing their crops to fail."^[109]

This year's floods, an emergency requiring an immediate response on par with humanitarian emergencies caused by the war, are also part of a global emergency that requires a coordinated long-term commitment. There is no sign that the intensity of rains and cyclones will be abated; on the contrary, they are expected to become more extreme. Communities and local governments require the tools and knowledge to adapt to such disasters and to understand the risks of redirecting rainwater without proper planning. The frequency of floods in Yemen should make flood risk reduction in IDP sites a priority, especially as several IDP sites are situated in high-risk areas.. The risk of floods remains high in Yemen for the upcoming months as the rainy season may stretch until October.

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[109] Sana'a Center interview with Anwar No'man, environmental scientists and Yemen climate change expert, June 22, 2020



The FSO Safer oil terminal moored offshore of Ras Issa port (n.d.) // Photo: Safer

FSO Safer: Renewed Warnings of Environmental Catastrophe

Seawater has leaked into the engine compartment of the FSO Safer, according to a report by The Associated Press, renewing focus on the potential environmental disaster posed by the abandoned oil tanker positioned in the Red Sea off the coast of Hudaydah.

The Floating Storage and Offloading (FSO) terminal, owned by Yemen’s national oil company Safer Exploration and Production Operation Company – more commonly known as Safer – is a converted single-hulled oil tanker, acquired by Yemen in 1986. Safer permanently moored it four nautical miles offshore of Ras Issa port, attached it to a 430-kilometer-long pipeline and installed equipment allowing for the transfer of crude oil to other tanker vessels. The FSO Safer became Yemen’s primary export point for light crude from Marib governorate until the escalation of the ongoing conflict in March 2015. The Marib–Ras Issa pipeline ceased operations and exports from, and regular maintenance on, the FSO Safer halted.^[110]

The AP, citing a recent internal report, said that seawater had damaged ship pipelines and increased the risk of the vessel sinking. A diving team was dispatched in June by Safer to seal holes in the ship where seawater was leaking in, though it is unclear how long the patchwork solution will hold. An October 2019 letter from the Yemeni minister of oil also detailed rusted equipment, inoperable fire extinguishing systems and the buildup of gases on the ship, which risk the tanker exploding. Experts say the damage to the ship is irreversible.^[111]

[110] “An Environmental Apocalypse Looming on the Red Sea — The Yemen Review, May 2019,” The Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, June 6, 2020, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/7504>

[111] Maggie Michael, “Seawater seeping into decaying oil tanker off Yemen coast,” The Associated press, June 26, 2020,

International efforts to defuse the dangers posed by the decrepit marine export terminal have gone nowhere, with blame for the standoff focused on the armed Houthi movement. Diplomatic sources have told the Sana'a Center that the Houthi movement appeared to be using the threat of an environmental disaster as part of brinksmanship with the Yemeni government and the international community, preventing assessments from being carried out as a form of political leverage.^[112] This argument was echoed by a European diplomat quoted by The Associated Press as accusing the Houthis of treating the vessel as a “deterrent like having a nuclear weapon.”^[113]

Concerned parties, including the Sana'a Center on multiple occasions, have warned of the potentially catastrophic consequences that an oil spill would risk to Yemen's western coastline, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, as well as to other countries that border the vital waterway. The tanker holds more than 1 million barrels of oil on board. A limited-circulation international assessment made available to the Sana'a Center in September 2019 estimated that a spill at the FSO SAFER terminal could be “potentially catastrophic ... with ecological, economic and human health impacts all highly likely to occur on a large scale.” Specifically for Yemen, the report stated that within a week of a spill some 500,000 Yemenis could be affected, with food, fuel and water supplies compromised, the fishing industry crippled and pollutants spread down the coast; in the event of an explosion or fire, some 9 million Yemenis could be left breathing the toxic fumes.^[114]

[112] Sana'a Center interviews with UN officials, July to November 2019.

[113] Maggie Michael, “Seawater seeping into decaying oil tanker off Yemen coast,” The Associated press, June 26, 2020,

[114] “The Brinksmanship of a Safer disaster,” The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, October 14, 2019, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8359>

Humanitarian and Human Rights Developments

Pledges to Aid UN Yemen Programs Fall Short by Nearly Half for Coming Year

Thirty donor countries pledged a total of US\$1.35 billion on June 2 at the virtual High-Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen co-hosted by Saudi Arabia and the United Nations.^[115] That compares to US\$2.4 billion the UN has said was necessary for the humanitarian response in Yemen this year, including US\$180 million specifically needed to address COVID-19.^[116] As of July 3, UN agencies had received funds worth US\$746.3 million, including US\$602.0 million for the UN's Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan 2020.^[117] A similar pledging event in February 2019 had raised pledges of US\$2.62 billion.

The event initially was scheduled to be held in-person in Riyadh in early April, but was delayed by the coronavirus pandemic. Since April, UN representatives have repeatedly warned that about 31 out of 41 UN programs in Yemen would be curtailed or closed within weeks if funds failed to materialize.^[118] A humanitarian aid worker in Sana'a, however, said shortages of funds were only expected to significantly impact the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), which would partially suspend activities in such a scenario.^[119] UNFPA reported in May that it had already suspended services at 140 of its 180 health centers in Yemen, leaving 320,000 pregnant women without care and leading to cases of death during childbirth. Bigger UN agencies such as WFP had sufficient funds to keep up activities in the near future, the source told the Sana'a Center.^[120] WFP has received US\$409.3 million as of June 23, just more than half of the funds required for the agency's activities in Yemen this year. By contrast, as of June UNICEF's 2020 appeal for US\$514 million had been only 10 percent* fulfilled.^[121]

[115] "Note to Correspondents: High-level Pledging Event for Yemen – Pledging result," UN, June 2, 2020, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2020-06-02/note-correspondents-high-level-pledging-event-for-yemen-pledging-result>

[116] Ibid.; "Yemen Conference 2020, High-Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen, Press Release," UNOCHA and King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, June 2, 2020, <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/01.06.2020%20PRESS%20RELEASE%20embargoed%20-%20Yemen%20HLPE.pdf>

[117] "Financial Tracking Service, Yemen," UNOCHA, consulted on July 3, 2020, <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/248/summary/2020>

[118] "Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Yemen, 16 April 2020," OCHA, April 16, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-mr-mark-6>

[119] Sana'a Center interview with Sana'a-based INGO staff, June 22, 2020.

[120] Ibid.

[121] "Yemen five years on: children, conflict and COVID-19", UNICEF, JUNE 2020, https://www.unicef.org/yemen/sites/unicef.org/yemen/files/2020-06/Yemen%20five%20years%20on_REPORT%20.pdf

Journalists Assassinated, Kidnapped and Persecuted Across Yemen

While Yemen was meant to celebrate the Day of the Yemeni Press in early June, the month highlighted the dangers for journalists operating the country and warring parties' efforts to silence critical media.

On June 2, unknown assailants shot dead Yemeni photographer and video journalist Nabil Hasan al-Quaety near his home in the Dar Saad neighborhood of Aden city. Several men in military uniforms had tried to hit him with their car after he exited his home, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported, citing the co-chair of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate.^[122] When Al-Quaety ran, the men shot him in his head, chest and hand.^[123] He died on his way to hospital.^[124] Agence France-Presse, for whom Al-Quaety had worked since 2015, reported that he was shot in his car after leaving his home.^[125] Representatives of the government and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) both condemned the killing, with the latter stating that it would investigate the case.^[126] Al-Quaety's support for the STC was often criticized by Islah members, and allegations spread on social media claiming that Islah was responsible for his killing.^[127]

On May 1, Yemeni journalist Assil Mustafa Swid was kidnapped and tortured, before being released by the end of May. Local reports and a representative of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate said Swid had been kidnapped by the STC-affiliated Fifth Brigade in Lahj governorate.^[128] Local reports linked his abduction to his contribution to a film broadcast on Qatari-owned Al Jazeera about Saudi Arabia's recruitment of Yemenis to fight along the Saudi-Yemeni border.^[129] A personal acquaintance of Swid told the Sana'a Center that during his detention, the journalist was subjected to electric shocks, denied sleep, regularly degraded and fed only once every three days.^[130]

Other journalists and academics were also kidnapped and arbitrarily arrested across the country. In Hadramawt, photojournalist Abdullah Awad Bakir was arrested on May 27 and detained in a military intelligence building, the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate reported, citing a notification it had received from the journalist's family.^[131]

[122] "Yemeni journalist Nabil al-Quaety killed outside his home in Aden," Committee to Protect Journalists, June 3, 2020, <https://cpj.org/2020/06/42860/>

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

[125] "AFP contributor Nabil Hasan al-Quaety killed in Yemen," Agence France-Presse, June 2, 2020, <https://www.afp.com/en/inside-afp/afp-contributor-nabil-hasan-al-quaety-killed-yemen>

[126] Ibid.; "Yemeni journalist Nabil al-Quaety killed outside his home in Aden," Committee to Protect Journalists, June 3, 2020, <https://cpj.org/2020/06/42860/>

[127] Bethan McKernan, "Yemeni journalist who backed independence for south is shot dead," The Guardian, June 3, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/03/yemeni-journalist-who-backed-independence-for-south-is-shot-dead>

[128] : Journalists remain in prison despite release order, while others kidnapped, Gulf Centre for Human Rights, May 21, 2020, <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/2394>. Nabil Alosaidi, Facebook, May 30, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/alosaidi/posts/10215625279054386->

[129] "Yemen: Journalists remain in prison despite release order, while others kidnapped," Gulf Centre for Human Rights, May 21, 2020, <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/2394>

[130] Sana'a Center interview with a personal acquaintance of Assil Swid on June 23, 2020.

[131] Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, "The journalists' syndicate condemns the arrest of Bakir and demands his

On June 22, the government-affiliated news agency Saba Net accused STC-aligned forces of kidnapping journalist Abdullah Badahin on the Socotra archipelago, citing the Ministry of Information.^[132] In Sana'a, Dr. Wadi'a Al-Shargabi, a lecturer at the Media Department of Hudaydah University, was kidnapped by a Houthis-affiliated armed group after his condemnation of the recent abduction of several of the university's students, a representative of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights said.^[133]

Several Yemeni journalists received death threats from political and armed groups in June. Among them, on June 8, Fathi Bin Lazraq, the editor-in-chief of the local newspaper Aden Al-Ghad, said in a tweet that he had received death threats from STC leader Yahya Ghalib al-Shuaibi.^[134] On June 5, local newspapers reported a correspondent in Aden with the Arabic-language channel of Russian state broadcaster Russia Today had received death threats following the killing of Nabil al-Quaety a few days earlier.^[135]

In April, a Houthis-controlled court in Sana'a sentenced four journalists to death and six others to time already served (for more see 'War and Pandemic – The Yemen Review, April 2020'). The journalists had been abducted in 2015 and experienced torture during their ongoing detention. The journalists' lawyer Abdel-Majeed Sabra told the Sana'a Center in June that the file has reached a dead end and the six journalists slated for release remain in detention, while executions had not taken place for the four condemned to death.^[136] Sabra said the judiciary stopped measures toward their release after UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths said on April 24 that the journalists may be part of a prisoner exchange deal.^[137] Sabra said the prosecution had subsequently received directives not to hand over the release orders to the Security and Intelligence Service, with a view to including the journalists in a prisoner exchange deal instead.^[138] The lawyer said he had submitted a request to the chief prosecutor on April 27, requesting information on the lack of progress on the release order.^[139] The request was sent back to the lawyer unanswered.^[140]

The Saudi-led coalition and affiliated local forces have also committed violations against free expression. In early April, Saudi police forces arrested Mohammed al-

immediate release [AR],” Facebook, May 29, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1620445741440737&id=542893015862687

[132] “The Ministry of Information condemns the transitional militia’s kidnapping of journalist Abdullah Badahin [AR],” Saba Net, June 22, 2020, <https://www.sabanew.net/viewstory/63525>

[133] Nabil Alosaidi, Facebook, May 17, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/alosaidi/posts/10215541585082089>; Yemen: Journalists remain in prison despite release order, while others kidnapped, Gulf Centre for Human Rights, May 21, 2020, <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/2394>; Nabil Alosaidi, Facebook, May 30, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/alosaidi/posts/10215625279054386>

[134] Fathi Bin Lazraq, Twitter, June 8, 2020, <https://twitter.com/fathibnlazraq/status/1269991854830956550>; “STC leader threatens life of Aden Al-Ghad editor-in-chief Fathi Bin Lazraq,” Al-Masdar Online, June 10, 2020, <https://al-masdaronline.net/national/896>

[135] “Death threats to RT channel correspondent in Yemen [AR],” Aden Al-Ghad, June 5, 2020, <https://adengad.net/news/467487>; “The RT correspondent in Aden receives death threats ... and the Russian Foreign Ministry intervenes [AR],” Aden Time, June 5, 2020, <http://aden-tm.net/NDetails.aspx?contid=131596>

[136] Sana'a Center interview with lawyer Abdel-Majeed Sabra on June 8, 2020.

[137] Ibid.; Yemen Future, Facebook, April 24, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/110037110647957/photos/a.120111749640493/127796272205374>

[138] Sana'a Center interview with lawyer Abdel-Majeed Sabra on June 8, 2020.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid.

Bokari, a Yemeni blogger and human rights activist, in Riyadh after he posted a video on social media in which he demanded equal rights for all, including homosexuals.^[141] The Riyadh police spokesperson had confirmed the arrest of Al-Bokari, stating that the video contained “expressions that contradict values and morals” as well as “sexual connotations.”^[142] According to Human Rights Watch, Al-Bokari was still being held in Al-Malaz prison in Riyadh as of June 8.^[143] Al-Bokari has been denied legal counsel and experienced physical and psychological mistreatment, including a forced anal exam.^[144] He had been living as an undocumented migrant in Saudi Arabia since mid-2019, when he fled Yemen after receiving death threats from Yemeni armed groups.^[145]

Yemen appears near the bottom of the 2020 World Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters Without Borders, taking the 167th position out of 180 countries.^[146] According to the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate 38 journalists have been killed in Yemen since 2014.^[147]

[141] Abu Talal al-Hamrani, Facebook, April 8, 2020, <https://twitter.com/al7mrany/status/1247678427819368451>

[142] “Arrest of the owner of the Al-Batha’ video store in Riyadh.. and this is his nationality [AR],” Al-Arabiya, April 8, 2020, <https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/saudi-today/2020/04/08/-وهذه-باليابا-باليابا-وهذه-جنسيته>

[143] “Saudi Arabia: Release Yemeni Blogger,” Human Rights Watch, June 8, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/08/saudi-arabia-release-yemeni-blogger>

[144] Ibid.

[145] Ibid.

[146] “2020 World Press Freedom Index,” Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

[147] Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, “The journalists’ syndicate congratulates to the Day of the Yemeni Press and demands an end to the iron fist towards the profession [AR],” Facebook, June 9, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1634731856678792&id=542893015862687

Other Humanitarian and Human Rights Developments in Brief:

- **June 10:** The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ended the assignment of its chief rights officer in Yemen, Elobaid Ahmed Elobaid, nearly nine months after Houthi forces denied him entry to Yemen, The Associated Press reported, citing UN documents.^[148] Yemen's delegation in Geneva informed the Yemeni foreign ministry that Elobaid's deputy, Abeer al-Khraisha, was appointed chief of mission.^[149] Speaking to the Sana'a Center, a Sana'a-based humanitarian aid worker confirmed that Al-Khraisha had taken office as the new head of OCHA in Yemen.^[150]
- **June 9:** UN Secretary-General António Guterres published the organization's annual report on children and armed conflict, which was widely criticized for having removed Saudi Arabia from a list of conflict parties that have violated children's rights in 2019, despite the Saudi-led coalition being responsible for killing or maiming 222 children last year.^[151] On June 22, a group of 24 NGOs sent an open letter to the UN Secretary-General asking him to reconsider delisting the Saudi-led coalition as well as Myanmar's Tatmadaw.^[152]
- **June 11:** UNHCR announced that more than 94,000 people had been displaced in Yemen since January.^[153]
- **June 11-13:** Three planes transported Yemeni nationals from Egypt to Sayoun airport in Hadramawt governorate as part of a government plan to repatriate citizens stranded in Jordan, Egypt and India.^[154]

[148] Maggie Michael, „UN agency replaces official blocked from entering Yemen,“ The Associated Press, June 10, 2020, <https://apnews.com/d6159eac00e23115ce93fd86f8340cd4>

[149] Ibid.

[150] Sana'a Center interview with Sana'a-based humanitarian aid worker, June 30, 2020.

[151] “Children and Armed Conflict, Report of the Secretary-General,” UN, June 2020,

[152] “Open Letter to the Secretary-General on the 2020 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict,” Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, June 22, 2020, <https://watchlist.org/publications/open-letter-to-the-secretary-general-on-the-2020-annual-report-on-children-and-armed-conflict>

[153] UNHCR twitter account, June 11, 2020, <https://twitter.com/UNHCRYemen/status/1270977780386275329>

[154] “First repatriation flight from Egypt lands in Yemen,” Arab News, June 11, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1688081/middle-east>; “144 passengers among Yemenis stranded in Egypt arrive at Seyoun International Airport” [AR], Aden Al-Ghad, June 13, 2020, <http://adengad.net/news/469294/>

International Developments

In the Region

Yemen-Eritrea Tension Rises as Fishermen Detained, Harassed

Tension between Yemen and Eritrea rose in June as incidents involving harassment of fishermen increased near the politically sensitive Hanish Islands in the Red Sea. On May 30, Eritrean naval forces detained at least 15 fishing boats and 57 Yemenis near the archipelago, which sits off the coast of Taiz governorate, as part of an anti-piracy operation. On June 3, the Yemeni government's Red Sea Coast Guard intercepted and held two boats and seven Eritreans who allegedly tried to hijack Yemeni fishing vessels.^[155] The next day, Yemeni Minister of Fisheries Fahd Kafayen accused Eritrea of attacking Yemeni boats and citizens in the country's territorial waters and demanded authorities release detained fishermen and the confiscated equipment.^[156] On June 6, Eritrean authorities released 19 Yemeni fishermen and eight vessels after intervention by the UAE, although 100 Yemenis, including many from earlier incidents, remained detained.^[157]

Yemen and Eritrea fought a brief war in 1995 after Eritrea landed military forces on several of the Red Sea islands. An international maritime boundary was established after rulings in 1998 and 1999 by the Permanent Court of Arbitration based in the Hague, which granted Yemen sovereignty over most of the Hanish Islands.^[158]

Yemeni Embassy in Riyadh Investigates Charging Yemenis for COVID-19 Tests

The Yemeni embassy in Riyadh opened an investigation in early June into reports that Yemenis attempting to cross from Saudi Arabia into Yemen were being forced to pay for COVID-19 testing before being allowed into the country. Arrangements had been put in place for Yemenis stranded in the Saudi city of Sharoura, on the border

[155] "Red Sea Coast Guard detains Eritreans attacking Yemeni fishermen," Al-Masdar Online, June 4, 2020, <https://al-masdaronline.net/local/875>

[156] "Eritrea attacks on Yemen fishermen must stop, insists minister," Middle East Monitor, June 4, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200605-eritrea-attacks-on-yemen-fishermen-must-stop-insists-minister/>

[157] "Eritrea releases 19 Yemeni fishermen out of 120 arbitrarily detained inside Yemeni waters," Al-Masdar Online, June 7, 2020,

[158] "Eritrea/Yemen – Sovereignty and Maritime Delimitation in the Red Sea," Permanent Court of Arbitration, <https://pca-cpa.org/en/cases/81/>

with Yemen's Hadramawt governorate, to receive free testing at the city's general hospital before being quarantined for 14 days at the Al-Wadiah border crossing inside Yemeni territory. Khaled Hizam, a top Yemeni official in Sharoura, was suspended for allegedly directing Yemenis instead to private hospitals charging between 700 Saudi riyals (\$185) and SR1,300 (nearly \$350) for COVID-19 tests.^[159]

Other Regional Developments in Brief:

- **June 7:** Iran's Red Crescent Society said it was working with Yemeni health officials in Sana'a to reopen a hospital in the capital. The 70-bed hospital was built in 2004 and closed in 2009 because of security concerns.^[160]
- **June 13:** Yemen's embassy in Riyadh announced it would close after COVID-19 was confirmed among embassy staff.^[161] The mission later announced that it would resume operations on June 21.^[162]
- **June 22:** Saudi authorities announced that the country would limit the number of pilgrims during the annual Hajj to Muslims currently residing in the Kingdom in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19. The restrictions will further strain the Saudi economy, which recently reopened following a months-long lockdown. Revenues from Hajj and the lesser pilgrimage, Umrah, are estimated at roughly \$12 billion annually.^[163]

[159] "Yemen embassy in Riyadh investigates COVID-19 bribery scheme at border crossing," Al-Masdar Online, June 5, 2020, <https://al-masdaronline.net/national/877>

[160] "IRCS to reopen hospital in Yemeni capital," Tehran Times, June 7, 2020, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/448587/IRCS-to-reopen-hospital-in-Yemeni-capital>

[161] Embassy of the Yemeni Republic in Saudi Arabia, Twitter, June 14, 2020, <https://twitter.com/Yemenembassysa/status/1271837042998157313>

[162] Embassy of the Yemeni Republic in Saudi Arabia, Twitter, June 19, 2020, <https://twitter.com/Yemenembassysa/status/1274056687511638016>

[163] "Saudi Arabia puts strict limit on number of hajj pilgrims," The Financial Times, June 23, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/7ec1a2cd-fd20-47f8-adce-6217d9bd159a>

THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL: FROM PARTICIPANT TO PASSIVE OBSERVER IN YEMEN

Commentary by Nickolas Ask

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has been the gatekeeper for UN efforts in Yemen for almost a decade.^[164] With a tortuous process where progress seems to come and go, some diplomats from member states of the UNSC have privately expressed disappointment that the Council is always “reacting” rather than “acting” when it comes to Yemen.^[165] The Security Council’s ability to be effective has been called into question by diplomats and analysts.^[166] As the past six years show, the UNSC has taken the backseat in Yemen, worried that tangible action would interfere with the UN Special Envoy’s efforts to broker a peace accord, and negatively impact the UN’s humanitarian offices working on the ground in Yemen.^[167]

The UN Security Council’s hard power comes from its ability to enact sanctions. On the heels of the National Dialogue Conference in 2014, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2140, creating a Sanctions Committee specific to Yemen. The Sanctions Committee was a key tool for the Security Council to aid the political and reconciliation processes and prevent potential spoilers of the political transition in Yemen.^[168] It subsequently designated three individuals on November 7: former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, along with two Houthi military commanders, Abd al-Khaliq al-Houthi and Abdullah Yahya al-Hakim.

The Sanctions Committee was also part of the Security Council’s swift response to the Houthi takeover of Sana’a in 2014 and the March 2015 launch of Operation Decisive Storm by the Saudi-led coalition. The Security Council adopted Resolution 2216, demanding the Houthis surrender, fully disarm and allow President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi’s government to resume its responsibilities. In April 2015 the Sanctions Committee designated two further individuals – Houthi leader Abdelmalek al-Houthi and Ahmed Saleh, son of the former president – and broadened the sanctions regime by adding an arms embargo.

Five years later, not much has come out of the Sanctions Committee, with the list of sanctioned individuals remaining the same since 2015. While the efforts of the UN’s Special Envoy have increased in prominence, the Security Council’s role, and that of the Sanctions Committee, diminished over time. As Sana’a Center Non-Resident Fellow Gregory Johnsen pointed out earlier this year, the Panel of Experts

[164] Resolution 2014 (2011) was adopted on October 21, 2011 linking its mandate of maintaining international peace and security to the situation in Yemen.

[165] Conversations with two diplomats from UN Security Council member states, New York, February 25, 2020.

[166] Richard Gowan, “Three Troubling Trends at the UN Security Council,” International Crisis Group, November 6, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/three-troubling-trends-un-security-council>

[167] “Humanitarian Agencies as Prisoners of War,” Sana’a Center For Strategic Studies, February 29, 2020, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/9120>

[168] “Briefing by the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014),” UN Security Council, May 14, 2014, <https://www.undocs.org/S/PV.7336>

highlighted several perpetrators who would fall within the Sanction Committee's designation criteria, with no reaction from the Security Council.^[169] The Security Council has reacted to the developments of the war and expanded to some areas that merit designation, such as the use of sexual violence and child recruitment during the conflict^[170] and starvation tactics as warfare.^[171]

With five new members entering the UN Security Council in 2021 — Kenya, India, Ireland, Mexico and Norway — there is an opportunity to reassess the UN Security Council's role in Yemen.^[172] New member states should be asking how the UNSC can play a more active role on the Yemen file, and how it might revitalize its Sanctions Committee. While there are only five individuals on the Sanctions List for Yemen, the UNSC has designated 36 individuals in the DRC,^[173] 80 in North Korea^[174] and 28 in Libya.^[175] With regard to non-state actors, for almost a decade the UNSC has had a specific sanctions regime for the Taliban, to whom the Houthis have been compared,^[176] under Resolution 1988 with 135 listed individuals.^[177] When faced with Houthi transgressions and unwillingness to take part in the special envoy's initiatives, including the ongoing ceasefire negotiations, the UNSC should consider whether a tougher approach, and examining the original intent behind the Yemen Sanctions Committee, might reactivate the Council's role in pushing for a political solution.

Seeking a More Engaging UNSC Debate

Another way to re-engage the Security Council would be to involve more voices, which would allow for a more nuanced and dynamic discussion at the council's monthly meetings on Yemen. Currently, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths provides a monthly briefing to the Security Council on his efforts, followed by a representative from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Subsequently, every month the 15 UNSC members express their concern regarding the current situation and most of them urge a political solution. Diplomats have expressed frustration with how repetitive these meetings can be.^[178]

[169] Gregory Johnsen, "UN Experts Detail Abuses in Yemen, Security Council Shrugs," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, March 18, 2020, https://sanaacenter.org/files/UN_Experts_Detail_Abuses_in_Yemen_%20Security_Council_Shrugs.pdf.

[170] Paragraph 6 of resolution 2511 (2020), February 25, 2020, [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2511\(2020\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2511(2020))

[171] "Adopting Resolution 2417 (2018), Security Council Strongly Condemns Starving of Civilians, Unlawfully Denying Humanitarian Access as Warfare Tactics," UN Security Council, May 24, 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13354.doc.htm>

[172] "Kenya wins final contested seat on Security Council," UN News, June 18, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1066632>

[173] "Sanctions List Materials, 1533 Sanctions List," UN Security Council, February 25, 2020,, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1533/materials>

[174] "Sanctions List Materials, 1718 Sanctions List," UN Security Council , May 11, 2020, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1718/materials>

[175] "Sanctions List Materials, 1979 Sanctions List," UN Security Council, February 25, 2020, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1970/materials>

[176] "Mimicking the Mullahs, The Houthi model of government," The Economist, February 6, 2020. <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/02/06/the-houthi-model-of-government>

[177] "Sanctions List Materials, 1988 Sanctions List" UN Security Council, January 30, 2019, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1988/materials>

[178] Discussion with diplomatic sources, February 25, 2020.

Although not a frequent occurrence, there is precedent for broader participation from a range of stakeholders in the monthly meetings on Yemen. Since 2017, one briefing each year has included a civil society representative. In April 2019, under the German presidency of the council, Mona Luqman, from Food for Humanity and a co-founding member of the Women Solidarity Network, described by Griffiths as one of Yemen's leading peace activists, provided an inspiring call for the UN Security Council to use its powers to ensure safe humanitarian access in Yemen.^[179] In November 2018, China invited Founder and Director of the Peace Track Initiative Rasha Jarhum to brief the Council.^[180] Human rights organizations have also spoken before the Security Council in the past, including Radhya al-Mutawakel, from the Mwatana Organization For Human Rights, who briefed the UNSC under Uruguay's presidency in May 2017.

The rotating president of the Security Council wields the power to invite outside speakers. This is also why the Yemeni government's permanent representative at the UN is able to address the Council each month despite Yemen not holding a place on the Council.^[181] The presidency is used as an opportunity for the serving member state to bring its priorities to the Council and craft the Council's agenda for the month.

There are a plethora of Yemeni voices that could contribute to a more useful discussion surrounding the conflict, and the Security Council should make it a priority to include diverse speakers more than once a year. Logistical issues are no longer an excuse; as the pandemic has shown, the Council is fully able to conduct meetings virtually when travel is an issue. By adopting this policy, the UN Security Council would become a more engaging forum and better serve its mandate of playing an instrumental role in shaping Yemen's future.

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[179] "Parties to Conflict in Yemen Have Accepted Plan for Redeployment of Forces from Hodeidah Port, Special Envoy Tells Security Council," UN Security Council, April 15, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13780.doc.htm>

[180] Charlotte Hooij, "Rasha Jarhum, Founder and Director of the Peace Track Initiative, briefs the UN Security Council on the Situation in Yemen," Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, November 19, 2018, <https://www.wilpf.org/rasha-jarhum-founder-and-director-of-the-peace-track-initiative-briefs-the-un-security-council-on-the-situation-in-yemen/>

[181] "Provisional Rules of Procedure (S/96/Rev.7)," Chapter VI: Conduct of Business, Rule 39, United Nations Security Council, accessed July 1, 2020, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/rop/chapter-6>

Other Developments at the UN in Brief:

- Special Envoy Martin Griffiths held his office's first large-scale online consultations on June 8-9 with more than 500 Yemenis, most of them from civil society organizations, to discuss peace efforts. On June 15-16, Griffiths hosted a virtual meeting with Yemeni women peace activists.
- The Southern Transitional Council (STC) has expanded its foreign branch offices to include a New York office that would focus on the United Nations.^[182] According to documents submitted under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, the STC has been sending humanitarian appeals and press statements to US government officials, and will now also be focusing on reaching out to UN Member States.^[183]

[182] "Yemen separatists open New York office to lobby UN," Foreign Lobby, June 15, 2020, <https://www.foreignlobby.com/2020/06/15/yemen-secessionists-open-new-york-office-to-lobby-un/>

[183] "Supplemental Statement Pursuant to the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, as amended," *Foreign Registration Act e-file*, June 8, 2020. <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6552-Supplemental-Statement-20200608-6.pdf>

In the United States

White House Briefs Senate on US Military Involvement in Yemen

US President Donald Trump, in a letter submitted June 9 to the Senate, confirmed that a US military presence remains in Yemen, saying a “small number” of US forces support the Yemeni government and regional partners in combating Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State group (IS). The White House’s letter came in response to required executive branch updates to lawmakers on US military troops deployed in hostile zones. It did not make any specific mention of recent US airstrikes in Yemen.^[184]

Trump also reaffirmed that US military support to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen does not involve direct US hostile actions against the armed Houthi movement. The US has maintained this messaging since the Obama administration. The distinction may stem from legal limits to the ability of the president to deploy US troops to hostile zones without congressional approval or a declaration of war.^[185] In the latest report, Trump described US assistance to the coalition as providing “limited information” along with advisory, logistical and “other support” to regional forces fighting the Houthis.^[186] Approximately 3,600 US troops based in Saudi Arabia also provide air and missile defense capabilities, up from 3,000 since the December 2019 report.^[187]

Congress has long demanded transparency regarding US assistance to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, with bipartisan calls to end the involvement altogether.^[188] However, these efforts have come against presidential vetoes and there remains a lack of votes in Congress to attain a veto-proof supermajority.

[184] “Trump’s Letter to the Senate on Current US Troops Deployments”, The White House, June 9, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/text-letter-president-speaker-house-representatives-president-pro-tempore-senate-9/>

[185] “War Powers,” Library of Congress, November 7, 1973. <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/usconlaw/war-powers.php>

[186] Donald J. Trump, “Text of a Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President pro tempore of the Senate”, The White House, June 9, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/text-letter-president-speaker-house-representatives-president-pro-tempore-senate-9/>

[187] Donald J. Trump, “Text of a Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President pro tempore of the Senate,” The White House, December 11, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/text-letter-president-speaker-house-representatives-president-pro-tempore-senate-8/>

[188] “Dismay as Trump vetoes bill to end US support for war in Yemen,” The Guardian, April 17, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/apr/16/trump-yemen-war-veto-military-aid>

Other Developments in the US Brief:

- **June 2:** A State Department delegation participated in the Yemen High-Level Humanitarian Virtual Pledging Conference held in Riyadh, but did not commit to any pledges. A statement issued after the conference included a reminder of past contributions — including \$225 million in emergency food assistance to the World Food Programme in Yemen in May — while urging other countries to speed up their disbursements.^[189]
- **June 21:** The New York Times published an article reviewing US and Saudi vetting failures that allowed Mohammed Alshamrani — a Saudi military officer who carried out an attack on a US naval base in Pensacola Florida in December 2019 — to join the Saudi military and enter the United States.^[190] In that review, the Times concluded that Alshamrani “was not directed start to finish by Al-Qaeda, nor was he simply inspired by online jihadist ideology. Instead he more closely resembled a self-directed contractor who was strongly enabled by Al-Qaeda’s Yemeni branch.” This assessment adds much needed nuance to AQAP’s claim of responsibility in February 2020 for the shooting attack.^[191]

[189] “Announcement of US Participation of The June 2 Yemen Donor Conference,” US Department of State, June 2, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/assistant-secretary-of-state-schenker-leads-u-s-delegation-to-high-level-virtual-pledging-conference-for-humanitarian-crisis-in-yemen/>

[190] Michael LaForgia and Eric Schmitt, “The Lapses that let a Saudi Extremist shoot up a U.S. Naval Base,” The New York Times, June 21, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/21/us/politics/saudi-gunman-vetting.html>

[191] “Attack on the American airbase in Pensacola,” AQAP, February 2, 2020. Accessed via jihadology.net, <https://jihadology.net/2020/02/02/new-video-message-from-al-qaidah-in-the-arabian-peninsulas-shaykh-qasim-al-raymi-and-satisfy-the-breasts-of-a-believing-people-blessing-and-adoption-of-the-attack-on-the-american/>

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