

The Yemen Review

MARCH 2019



**THE UN'S
STOCKHOLM
SYNDROME**



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:

A fishmonger in the Saddam Neighborhood Market, in al-Salakhana, Hudaydah City, sells his catch on March 25, 2019 // Photo Credit: Abduljabbar Zeyad

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

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Members of the second batch of Brigade 22 recruits march in formation during a graduation ceremony in Taiz City on March 11, 2019 // Photo Credit: Hossam Alqoliaa

The Sana'a Center Editorial

Saudi Arabia's 'Deportation Storm'

March marked four years since Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates led a coalition of Arab states into a military intervention in Yemen. The campaign's initial moniker, 'Operation Decisive Storm,' would now seem farcical if the consequences of the conflict, which continues to rage around the country, were not so utterly tragic. Yemenis and those who follow events in the country are already well aware of how the war and economic collapse have laid waste to the structures of society and pushed millions to the brink of famine.

There is a second assault against Yemen in which Saudi Arabia is engaged, however, one that is today going almost entirely unnoticed as world powers focus on salvaging the stalled United Nations-led peace process. Whether or not they succeed in saving the Stockholm Agreement from its current slide into irrelevance, or are eventually able to move toward a comprehensive political resolution to the conflict, if Saudi Arabia continues to expel Yemeni expatriate workers at pace it will condemn its southern neighbor to many more years of instability, insecurity and humanitarian crisis.

For decades, poor job prospects at home have driven waves of Yemenis to seek work abroad, mostly in Saudi Arabia, and mostly as unskilled or semi-skilled laborers. Given the irregular nature of much of their work, accurate statistics are difficult to

come by, but available best estimates are that more than a million Yemenis currently work in Saudi Arabia. After large-scale oil exports from Yemen dried up following the coalition military intervention four years ago, remittances from these expatriate workers – worth billions of dollars annually – became Yemen's largest source of foreign currency. This money helped prevent Yemen's plight from being far worse: it slowed the Yemeni rial's depreciation, supplied the local market with foreign currency to finance imports, and provided millions in Yemen with an income as unemployment soared.

In recent years, however, Saudi Arabia has stepped up its campaign to nationalize its workforce. This has included barring expatriate workers from many occupations, increasing the fees and levies those legally registered in the kingdom must pay to remain, and carrying out mass arrest campaigns and forcibly deporting unregistered workers. This has already led to tens of thousands of Yemenis being forced out of work and back to Yemen. In a soon-to-be released study, Sana'a Center researchers found that should Riyadh follow through with the labor market reforms it has already announced, more than 70 percent of Yemeni expatriates in Saudi Arabia may lose their jobs as of 2020. This would give new thrust to the suffering of Yemenis and their country's dissolution.

Regardless of whether the current conflict ends or not, the return of hundreds of thousands of unemployed laborers to Yemen and the loss of their remittances would undermine any foundation upon which to build socio-economic and political stability in the country for years to come. Indeed, the economic hardship and social instability that resulted from Saudi Arabia expelling roughly a million Yemeni workers in 1990 in many ways helped set the stage for Yemen's current volatility.

Saudi Arabia is the largest donor to the multi-billion dollar international aid effort in Yemen. It is also the party most responsible for Yemen needing such enormous amounts of assistance; by expelling Yemeni workers Riyadh will ensure this remains the case into the foreseeable future. If the aim of Saudi rulers is to avoid a failed state along the kingdom's largest land border, a far better policy prescription would be to expel Yemeni government leaders, whose members have luxuriated in Riyadh hotels since 2015, to make them earn their keep back home, and allow the Yemeni workers to stay.

The UN's Stockholm Syndrome

Special Envoy Hostage to His Own Peace Plan

In March, as with the two month previous, there was no meaningful progress toward implementing the various aspects of the Stockholm Agreement – the United Nations-mediated deal between the internationally recognized Yemeni government and the armed Houthi movement. Instead, March saw continued ceasefire violations around the Yemeni port city of Hudaydah and the warring parties issuing sabre-rattling castigations against each other. UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, who chaired the December 2018 talks in Sweden, has been unable to gain traction with the warring parties in implementing the Stockholm Agreement. Indeed, in the months since the talks what has become apparent is that the Special Envoy has effectively become hostage to the same ambiguities he and his team wrote into the deal to have it secured.^[1]

As the Sana'a Center previously reported, with the December 13 end-date for the talks in Sweden looming, mediators had pushed for a deal to be reached to show results. They were ultimately successful, but not through securing sincere compromises from the belligerents. Rather, the purposeful use of imprecise language in the deal made the commitments it stipulated vague enough for the warring parties to walk away with significantly different – and self-serving – interpretations of what they had agreed to. The UN's attempts to implement the agreement on the ground thus stalled almost immediately.

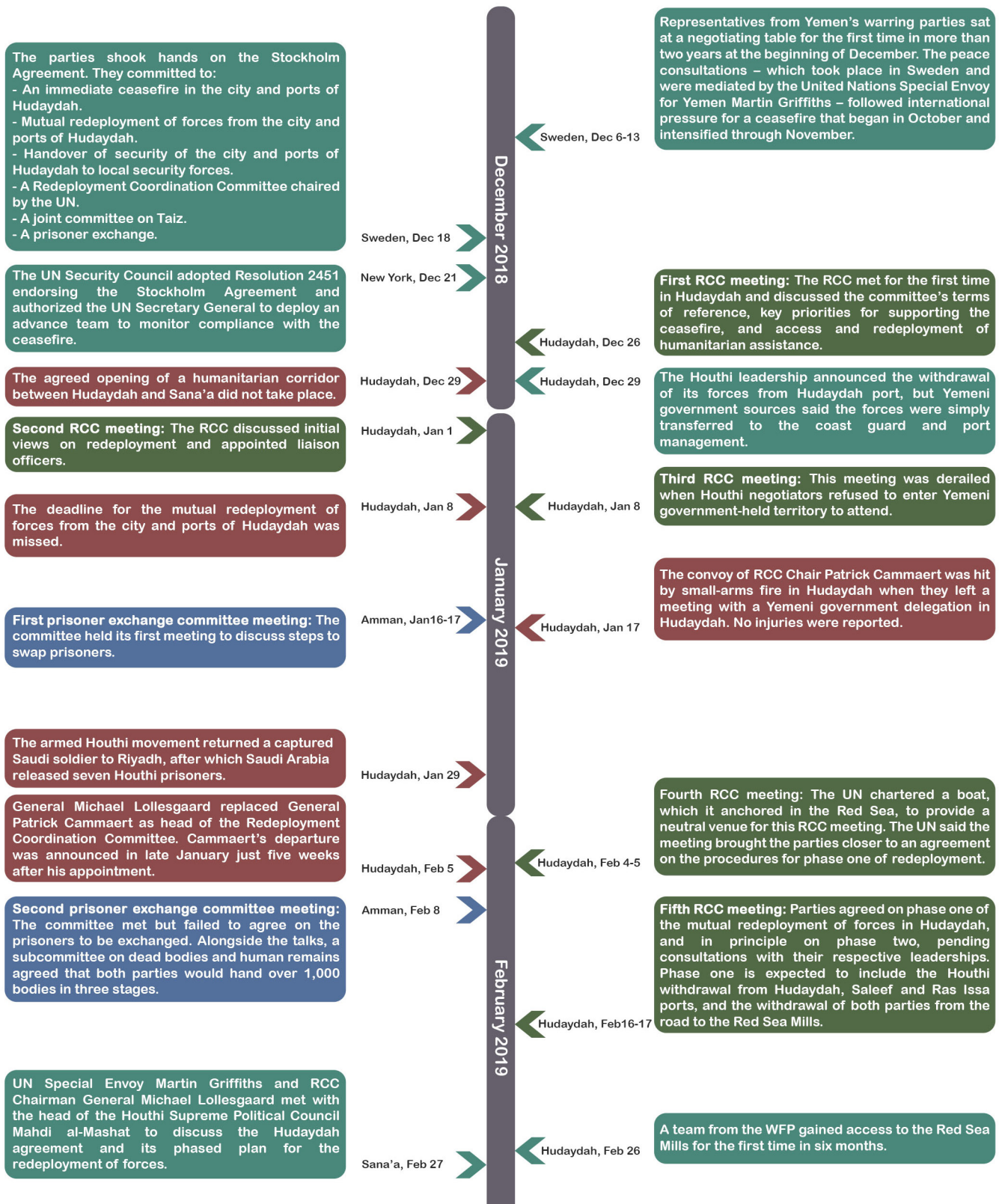
For instance, the most significant aspects of the Sweden deal relate to a ceasefire around and phased mutual withdrawal of forces from the port city of Hudaydah. Following the withdrawal of forces, the agreement stipulated that security in Hudaydah would be “the responsibility of local security forces in accordance with Yemeni law.” Given that both warring parties consider themselves legitimate authorities, their interpretations of “Yemeni law” and the “local security forces” it mandates differ wildly. Both sides have sought to have these security forces composed of their respective partisans. While the UN-chaired Redeployment Coordination Committee meetings have brought the belligerents together, the makeup of the local security forces has remained an intractable impasse. The Stockholm Agreements' other key features – regarding a prisoner exchange and the formation of a joint committee for Taiz City – have, likewise, progressed little.

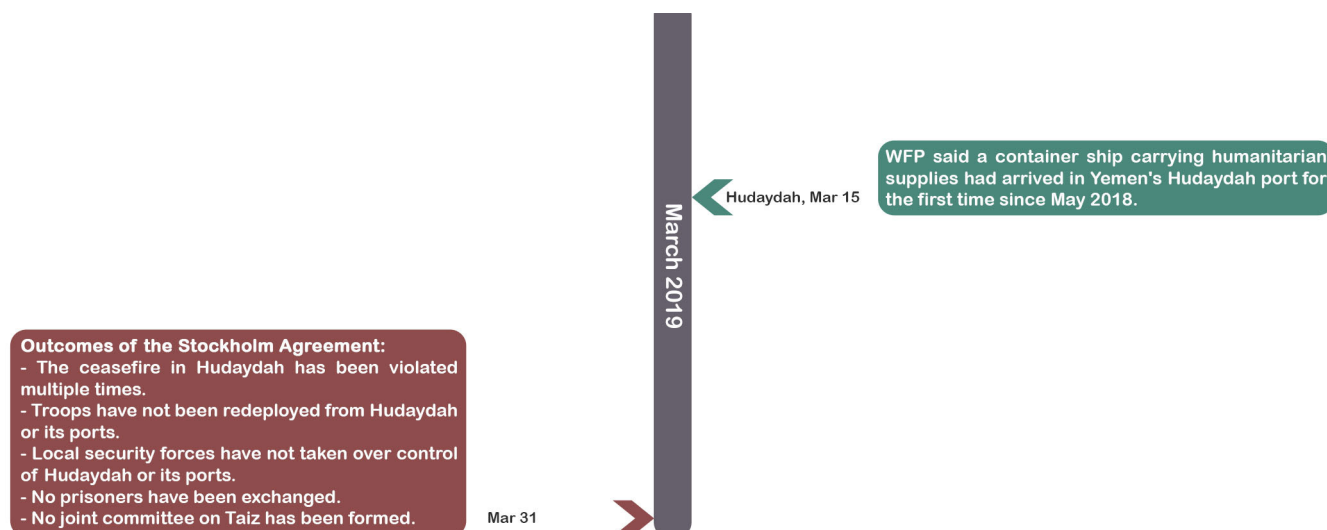
The same agreement which the Special Envoy inked between the parties has also effectively disarmed him given that, even with implementation stalled, both belligerents have grounds to claim that they are still acting within its parameters.

[1] The term “Stockholm Syndrome”, named after a hostage situation that took place in the Swedish capital in 1973, refers to a mental condition in which hostages develop an enforced psychological dependence on their captors. For details, see <https://www.britannica.com/science/Stockholm-syndrome>.

The diplomatic capital that Griffiths, the UN Security Council, the United States, the United Kingdom and others have poured into the Stockholm Agreement has also essentially ensured that, for the time being at least, there is no plausible alternative – Griffiths is committed to the deal that shackles him.

Timeline of the Stockholm Agreement





Graphic: Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies

“Last Chance Saloon” for Peace Process: UK Foreign Secretary

In an attempt to salvage the Hudaydah Agreement, on March 1 UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt embarked on a three-day regional tour including a visit to Aden, the temporary capital of the internationally recognized Yemeni government.^[2] Hunt's visit to Yemen was the first by a Western foreign minister since the Saudi-led military intervention began in March 2015, and the first by a UK Foreign Secretary since 1996. In Aden, Hunt met with his Yemeni government counterpart Khaled al-Yamani. During his regional tour Hunt also met with Yemeni President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi and Saudi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Assaf in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Houthi spokesperson Mohammed Abdelsalam and Omani ruler Sultan Qaboos bin Said in Muscat, Oman; and United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

The focus of Hunt's meetings was the stalemate surrounding the Stockholm Agreement. “We are now in last chance saloon for the Stockholm peace process,” Hunt said in a statement from Aden, warning that the process could be dead “within weeks” if both sides did not stick to the commitments made in Sweden.^[3]

[2] “Press Release: Foreign Secretary visits Yemen to bolster support for UN peace process,” The National Archives Government of UK, March 3, 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-visits-yemen-to-bolster-support-for-un-peace-process>. Accessed March 23, 2019.

[3] “UK's Hunt says Yemen peace process ‘could be dead within weeks’,” Reuters News, March 3, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-hunt/uks-hunt-says-yemen-peace-process-could-be-dead-within-weeks-idUSKCN1QK0FV>. Accessed March 24, 2019.

UN Special Envoy Pushes Phased Redeployment of Forces

Sana'a Center sources reported growing frustration at the United Nations Security Council in March over the lack of progress in implementing the Sweden deal. The UK — penholder of the Yemen file at the UN Security Council (UNSC) — requested a closed consultation at the UNSC for March 13 with the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths and the chair of the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) General Michael Lollesgaard, to discuss the lack of progress on the Stockholm Agreement. There, Griffiths informed the Security Council of new operational details he said may break the impasse in Hudaydah. These were not made public, but according to Sana'a Center sources Griffiths proposed placing additional UN monitors at the ports in Hudaydah after the withdrawal of Houthi forces, and delaying discussions on the composition of local security forces and the coast guard to the next phase of the process.

The Hudaydah agreement calls for the redeployment of forces away from the city and ports of Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Issa, and for local security forces to take responsibility for the area. The makeup of these forces has been a contentious issue (for more information see *The Yemen Review*: February 2019).^[4] Griffiths also implied that if challenges persisted he may explore the option of reconvening a new round of UN-led peace consultations; according to the Stockholm Agreement these should have taken place in January, however the Special Envoy had previously stated that there needed to be more progress on implementing the Stockholm Agreement before the next round of talks could be held (for more details, see Special Envoy: “We Need to Remain Hopeful”).^[5] Griffiths also told the permanent five (P5) member countries of the council that their direct support would play a significant role in his ability to convene a new round of talks.

Prior to the closed consultations, the Special Envoy met with ambassadors of the P5, who welcomed Griffiths' proposal in a statement on March 12.^[6] The P5 urged both parties “to begin implementation of the proposal in good faith without further delay and without seeking to exploit the redeployments by the other side.”^[7] In general, however, March was marked by a slowdown in activity on Yemen at the Security Council, compared to recent months. Sana'a Center diplomatic sources said the Special Envoy had recommended that council members limit their press statements in March, given the warring parties' current hyper-sensitivity and propensity to exchange blame for not implementing their part of the agreement.

On March 19, the Special Envoy announced that following consultations with the warring parties, “there is significant progress toward an agreement to implement phase one of the redeployments of the Hudaydah agreement.” In a statement, Griffiths said that operational details would be presented to the parties for endorsement

[4] “Diplomacy Sinking at Hudaydah Port – The Yemen Review, February 2019,” Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, March 7, 2019, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/7162>. Accessed March 24, 2019.

[5] “Stockholm Agreement Meets Yemeni Reality – The Yemen Review, January 2019,” Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, March 11, 2019, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/7027#Special-Envoy-We-Need-to-Remain-Hopeful>. Accessed March 23, 2019.

[6] US Embassy in Yemen, “Statement from the Ambassadors of the P5 Countries to Yemen,” March 12, 2019, <https://ye.usembassy.gov/statement-from-the-ambassadors-of-the-p5-countries-to-yemen/>. Accessed March 24, 2019.

[7] Ibid.

shortly.^[8] Reuters reported that Houthi forces had agreed to withdraw in two phases.^[9] In the first phase, Houthi forces would withdraw five kilometers from the ports of Saleef and Ras Issa. Then, Houthi forces and coalition forces would both withdraw one kilometer from the “Kilo 7” area and the Saleh City district. The second phase would see both sides withdraw their troops 18 kilometers from Hudaydah City and move their heavy weaponry 30 kilometers outside the city, according to Reuters. As of writing, there has been no observable movement toward the implementation of such a plan.

GoY, Houthis Exchange Vitriol; Hudaydah Headed for “Explosion”

On the same day that Griffiths announced “significant progress” on the Hudaydah agreement, the head of the Houthis’ Supreme Revolutionary Committee, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, told the Associated Press that the armed Houthi movement would not give up Hudaydah and accused the internationally recognized Yemeni government of misinterpreting the deal. Al-Houthi said that the movement had agreed to withdraw its forces but would remain in control.^[10] “We agree on the redeployment according to the presented mechanism, but withdrawal as they are promoting, is impossible,” he said.

Also on March 19, the deputy foreign minister for the Houthi government, Hussein al-Ezzi, held a press conference on the Stockholm Agreement during which he blamed President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi’s government for the delays in implementing the agreement.^[11] Hadi’s government had misinterpreted the issue of redeploying forces in Hudaydah, al-Ezzi said.

On March 20, the spokesperson for the Yemeni government, Rageh Badi, responded to the statements by al-Ezzi and al-Houthi at a press conference in Aden.^[12] Badi characterized the Houthi officials’ comments as a “renunciation of the Hudaydah agreement and a declaration of war,” adding that developments were moving toward an “explosion of the situation” in Hudaydah. The internationally recognized Yemeni government believed the armed Houthi movement could seek to resume the war within days, the spokesperson said. Asked about Griffiths’ new proposal on the

[8] “Statement by The Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, on the Implementation of the Hudayda Agreement,” UN Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen, March 19, 2019, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/statement-special-envoy-secretary-general-yemen-martin-griffiths-implementation-hudayda-agreement>. Accessed March 23, 2019.

[9] Mohamed Ghobari, “Heavy weapons fire rocks Yemen’s Hodeidah as U.N. pushes to clinch troop pullout,” Reuters News, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-yemen-security/heavy-weapons-fire-rocks-yemens-hodeidah-as-un-pushes-to-clinch-troop-pullout-idUKKCN1R6200>. Accessed March 25, 2019.

[10] Ahmed al-Haj, “AP Interview: Yemen’s rebels say they won’t give up port,” The Associated Press, March 19, 2019, <https://apnews.com/030f408b58bc4dec9cde4b11e8439873>. Accessed March 24, 2019.

[11] Al Masirah Video Channel, “وقائع المؤتمر الصحفي لنائب وزير الخارجية حسين العزي” (“Proceedings of the Press Conference of Deputy Foreign Minister Hussein Al-Ezzi”), YouTube Video, March 18, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrGKISVlbPo>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[12] Yemen Arab Roots, “ناطق الحكومة اليمنية : الحوثيون يتخلّون رسمياً عن اتفاق السويد ولم تصلنا أية أفكار جديدة من “غريفيث” (Yemeni government spokesman: The Houthis officially quit the Swedish agreement and we have not received any proposals from Griffiths”), YouTube Video, March 21, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywdOCQoblz0>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

redeployment of forces in Hudaydah, Badi said the Yemeni government had not been informed about it. After Griffiths' statement on the issue, the Yemeni government contacted Lollesgaard for further details, said Badi, and the RCC chair responded that the proposed arrangements would be shared in the coming days.

Ceasefire Violations See Heaviest Fighting Since December

Over the course of the month, Hudaydah saw recurrent spikes in armed clashes, though no changes in frontlines. These included gunfire on March 3 in the frontline areas of al-Halqa market, the July 7 neighborhood and Street 50 in the east of the city.^[13] Hostilities were also reported in other parts of the governorate, in the districts of Durayhimi, Tuhayta and Hays, to the south of the city. UNICEF said that an attack in Tuhayta killed five children while they were “playing at home” on February 29.^[14] On March 9, clashes escalated again in Hudaydah city, this time involving heavy artillery according to local reports.^[15] A fire broke out at Ikhwan Thabit industrial complex in the east of the city amid the hostilities, damaging a food packaging factory. On the night of March 24, the city saw some of the heaviest fighting since the beginning of the ceasefire, with local residents reporting exchanges of heavy weapon fire.^[16] The fighting was concentrated in the July 7 neighborhood in the east of the city and on the southern outskirts.

Stockholm Agreement-Related Developments in Brief:

- **March 4:** The internationally recognized Yemeni government, the UAE and Saudi Arabia wrote to the UN Security Council, rejecting claims of ceasefire violations by coalition forces. An annex to the letter listed 1,754 alleged Houthi violations since the start of the ceasefire in Hudaydah on December 18, 2018, which the coalition members said had killed 125 coalition forces and wounded 780. The coalition members blamed the armed Houthi movement for “months of stalling tactics” over the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, and called for the deployment of more UN monitors to Hudaydah.
- **March 20:** Khaled al-Yamani, foreign minister in the internationally recognized Yemeni government, wrote to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to complain about a meeting on March 16 between Houthi representatives and staff from the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) and the

[13] “Hodeidah witnessed the fiercest clashes between government forces and Houthis for months,” Al-Mashhad Al-Yemeni, March 3, 2019, <https://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/128078>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[14] “Violent deaths of five children in Hudaydah a harsh reminder that war rages on after Yemen pledging conference,” UNICEF, March 2, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/violent-deaths-five-children-hudaydah-harsh-reminder-war-rages-after-yemen-pledging>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[15] “معارك عنيفة شرقي الحديدة تسفر عن قتلى حوثيين وحريق التهم مصنعاً” (“Heavy fighting east of Hudaydah results in Houthi deaths and a factory fire”), al-Masdar Online, March 9, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165117>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[16] Mohamed Ghobari, “Heavy weapons fire rocks Yemen’s Hodeidah as U.N. pushes to clinch troop pullout,” Reuters, March 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/heavy-weapons-fire-rocks-yemens-hodeidah-as-u-n-pushes-to-clinch-troop-pullout-idUSKCN1R614F>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

Special Envoy's office. Al-Yamani accused the envoy's office of overstepping its authority by discussing a mechanism to move UNVIM's work from Djibouti to Hudaydah port with Houthi representatives.^[17] Further discussions on this move, which was agreed during peace talks in Sweden in December, should not take place until after the redeployment of forces in Hudaydah, al-Yamani said. Further, he added that the Yemeni government should be involved in these discussions.

[17] Mareb Press, March 21, 2019, https://marebpress.net/news_details.php?sid=148983. Accessed March 24, 2019.

Developments in Yemen

Military and Security Developments

Major Clashes Between Anti-Houthi Forces in Taiz City

Clashes broke out in Taiz City between anti-Houthi forces shortly after the arrival of the new governor, Nabil Shamsan, in March. Since the beginning of the conflict there have been regular spates of violence between rival armed groups in Taiz — Yemen's third largest city — where power and security in government-controlled areas is divided between different local actors.

Shamsan arrived in the southwestern governorate on March 17, with fighting erupting the following day after the killing of Lieutenant Colonel Abdallah Moqbil, an officer in the 22nd Mechanized Brigade — a military unit dominated by the political Islamist party, Islah.^[18] The alleged perpetrators were aligned with the UAE-backed Salafist militia leader, Adel Abdu Farea, who is more commonly known as Abu al-Abbas. Since helping to prevent a full Houthi takeover of Taiz in the first months of the war, the Abu al-Abbas Brigades have competed with Islah-affiliated forces for influence in the city. In August 2018, following violent clashes between the two groups, they agreed to a mutual redeployment of forces away from the city. However, by month's end most of Abu al-Abbas' forces had relocated — though the group maintained security at its headquarters — while Islah-affiliated forces asserted greater control.^[19]

Following the March clashes, Shamsan announced a crackdown on gunmen in the city, demanding that those responsible for Moqbil's death be handed over to the local police.^[20] He also called for the withdrawal of these armed groups from the city and the removal of unofficial checkpoints. However, more heavy armed clashes followed, including in residential areas. In a statement, the Abu al-Abbas group said that it played a vital "social and civic" role in Taiz and bemoaned its "lack of formal acceptance" despite its role on the frontlines of the fight against the Houthis.^[21] On March 23, the Abu al-Abbas group agreed to withdraw from their main base in the

[18] "Clashes in Taiz following the killing of an officer of the government forces by gunmen close to Abu Al-Abbas," Al-Masdar Online, March 18, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165497>. Accessed March 25, 2019.

[19] "Islah's Political and Military Ascent in Taiz", Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, November 12, 2018, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/6634>. Accessed April 5, 2019.

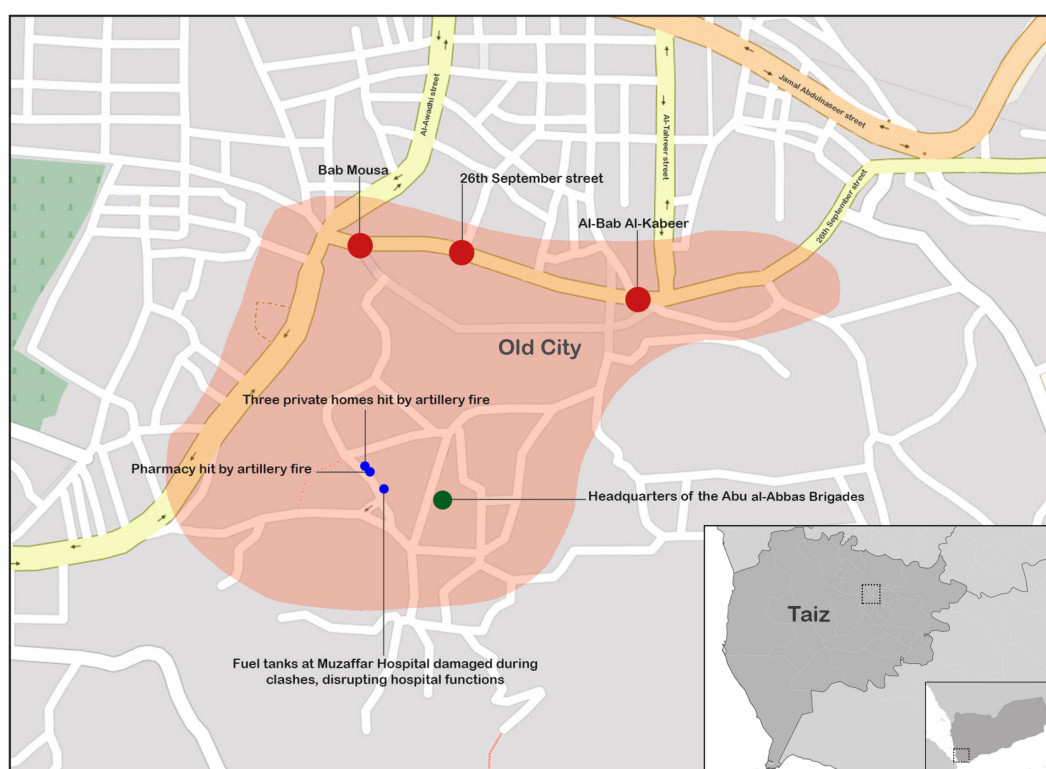
[20] "The security campaign is continuing... Taiz police arrest security wanted and others killed in clashes," Al-Masdar Online, March 21, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165630>. Accessed March 25, 2019.

[21] Eastern Front for Popular Resistance "Taiz" — Abu Abbas Front, Facebook Post, March 22, 2019, 11:00pm, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2068393649940100&id=808611169251694. Accessed March 25, 2019.

city — the Hayel Compound — and allow local police to takeover security.^[22] Days later, Islah released a statement saying that it had no militia operating outside state security structures and that the party was the victim of a smear campaign. In an Islah-organized rally on March 30 to mark the onset of fighting in Taiz four years ago, participants carried placards showing images of Saudi and UAE leaders and banners with slogans supporting coalition member states.^[23]

Civilian casualties were reported in parts of the city, although no aggregate death tolls were provided.^[24] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said it had treated 49 injured in the fighting and received two dead, but the fighter/civilian composition of this number is not clear.^[25] A Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) study found that the rate of civilian casualties in Taiz had doubled since December 2018.

Area of Clashes between Anti-Houthi Forces in Taiz City, March 2019



Legend

- Area of clashes between the Abu Abbas Brigades and the Yemeni Army's 22nd Brigade
- Heavy clashes locations

©Sana'a Center For Strategic Studies, March 2019

Graphic & Research: Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies

[22] "Taiz.. Official Committee receives the headquarters of "Abu Abbas" gunmen and agreement on a mechanism for deployment of the police," Al-Masdar Online, March 24, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165710> Accessed March 25, 2019.

[23] "Thousands participate in a rally called for by the Islah party in Taiz demanded the liberation of the city completely," Al-Masdar Online, March 30, 2019. <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165978>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[24] "Taiz.. Security campaign stops firing after it progresses in areas where militants are stationed and waiting for wanted extradition," Al-Masdar Online, March 23, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165663>. Accessed March 25, 2019.

[25] "People unable to access lifesaving care amid heavy fighting in Taiz city," Médecins Sans Frontières, March 24, 2019, <https://www.msf.org/yemen-forty-nine-wounded-and-two-dead-after-four-days-heavy-fighting-taiz-city>. Accessed March 27, 2019.

Houthi Subdue Tribal Uprising in Hajjah

Following weeks of fierce clashes in Kushar district, Hajjah, Houthi forces defeated local tribesmen and exerted control over the area in March. While the local Hajur tribe had remained neutral during the current conflict, tensions with Houthi forces escalated in mid-February in the mountainous Kushar district, through which Houthi supply routes run toward Haradh City and the Midi frontline. Houthi forces responded to the uprising with decisive force, likely in an effort to quell any nascent tribal rebellions in other areas under their control. The coalition airdropped military, food and medical supplies from the onset of the hostilities; observers reported that this support was inadequate and that the coalition had thus lost an opportunity to advance on Houthi supply lines between Sana'a and Sa'ada.^[26]

There is an effective siege on the area and displacement has soared; the Norwegian Refugee Council recorded 3,700 newly displaced families from Kushar district.^[27] At a governorate level, internal displacement has more than doubled over the past six months, from 203,000 people to 420,000. At least 22 civilians were killed in aerial attacks on March 10-11, pushing the UN to release a statement on the developments in Hajjah, which had until then received scant attention internationally.^{[28][29]}

By mid-March, the fighting had largely subsided following the killing of tribal leader Abu Muslim al-Zakri and the subsequent surrender of other prominent figures.^{[30][31]} A campaign of mass arrests followed and Houthi forces have since resumed their focus on the Midi front and fighting around Haradh.

War Between AQAP and Daesh Escalates

On March 24, the ongoing clashes between al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the so-called 'Islamic State' group, or Daesh, intensified when a Daesh suicide bomber managed to detonate his explosives inside the house of an AQAP commander in al-Bayda governorate. The commander, Abu Wafa al-Suraymi, was killed along with several other individuals. AQAP retaliated by overrunning several nearby Daesh positions, sparking a number of clashes across the governorate of al-Bayda.

[26] "A Grim Anniversary: Yemen After Four Years of the Saudi-led Military Intervention," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, March 26, 2019, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/7239>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[27] "Update on situation in Hajjah and Hodeidah," Norwegian Refugee Council, March 13, 2019, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2019/march/on-the-record-update-on-situation-in-hajjah-and-hodeidah-yemen/>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[28] "Twenty-two civilians killed, including children, in north Yemen: U.N." Reuters, March 11, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/twenty-two-civilians-killed-including-children-in-north-yemen-un-idUSKBN1QS27W>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[29] "Dozens killed and injured by new attacks in western Yemen, UN coordinator condemns 'outrageous' toll," UN News, March 11, 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/03/1034491>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[30] "The president and his deputy are proud of the martyrdom of resistance leader #Hajour," الرئيس ونائبه يعزيان في، استشهد قائد مقاومة #حجور، Aden Lng, March 11, <https://adnlnl.info/news/113316/>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[31] "Al-Houthi campaign in Hajur continues.. Kidnapping, storming houses, looting cars," Al-Masdar Online, March 20, 2019. <https://almasdaronline.info/articles/165565>, Accessed April 2, 2019.

But in its effort to carry out what it describes as “economic warfare” Daesh may have overstepped. In the area in al-Bayda near where it carried out the suicide attack it also destroyed a well along with an agricultural water pump. This damage to infrastructure upon which locals depend allowed AQAP to, within days, team up with tribes in the area to go after Daesh. They even placed a 5 million Yemeni rial bounty on the head of Khalid al-Marfadi, a Daesh leader in al-Bayda. (In October 2017, the United States sanctioned al-Marfadi for his actions on behalf of Daesh in Yemen.)

The US military was also active in al-Bayda, carrying out six airstrikes in March. These are the first acknowledged strikes by the US in Yemen since January, when it carried out two: one in Marib, which killed Jamal al-Badawi, and one in al-Bayda. The US did not release the number of casualties it believed it killed in the six strikes.

In Abyan governorate, Security Belt Forces, which are trained and backed by the UAE, arrested an alleged AQAP explosives expert named Abd al-Qadir al-Mawt, who was believed to be behind a series of assassination operations. One week after his arrest on April 1, Abd al-Qadir al-Mawt’s body was reportedly discovered on the side of the road near where he had been captured.

Other Military and Security Developments in Brief:

- **March 1:** A civilian was killed and several injured when Houthi gunmen exchanged fire at a mosque in Mudhaykhira district, Ibb governorate. Local media said the fighting was a result of a dispute over the ownership of a qat farm, and came days after another incidence of Houthi infighting in northern Ibb.^[32]
- **March 12:** There were reports of an explosion in the town of al-Dhalea during clashes between government-affiliated security forces and UAE-backed Security Belt forces. Casualties and injuries were reported on each side, and locals blocked roads the following day in demonstrations against the fighting.
- **March 13:** Units within the Shabwah Elite Forces exchanged fire in Nassab district, Shabwah governorate, when a commander refused to follow the orders of a superior.^[33] The clashes were attributed to “tribal conflicts and affiliations.” Local media said this is the first time that clashes have occurred between UAE-backed security force units, which have led a counterterrorism campaign against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and have since become the main security actor in the oil-rich southern governorate.
- **March 14:** At least 30 Yemeni government allied soldiers were either killed or injured by coalition airstrikes in the mountainous area of al-Rabaa in Barat al-Anan district, AlJawf governorate.^[34]

[32] “Six dead and wounded in clashes between Houthis in a mosque in Ibb province,” Al-Masdar Online, March 2, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/164869>. Accessed March 24, 2019.

[33] “Armed clashes between the factions of the “elite” forces,” الشبوات “النخبة” الشبواتية, Aden Post, March 13, 2019, <http://aden-post.com/news/63079/>. Accessed March 18, 2019.

[34] “Military source: About 30 government soldiers killed and wounded by coalition raid in Al-Jawf,” Al-Masdar Online, March 14, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/164869>. Accessed March 18, 2019.

- **March 25:** Two Saudi soldiers were released through mediation after being detained by Bani Nouf tribesmen in al-Jawf governorate while they were traveling from the al-Yutama region to the governorate's capital, al-Hazm.^[35] There have been no reports on the status of six Yemeni soldiers who were also detained. Al-Masdar online quoted tribal sources as saying that the tribesmen were seeking the release of two members that were arrested in al-Mahra governorate over a year ago while they were traveling to the Shabin border crossing to enter Oma^[36]
- **March 27:** Saudi forces deployed around Socotra airport following the death of Saudi officer Abdul Latif al-Qahtani.^[37] The cause of the officer's death was unknown at the time of writing. Saudi troops arrived in Socotra in May 2018 to defuse escalating tensions over a UAE troop presence in the archipelago, and the status of Socotra has since been a source of tension within the Saudi-led coalition.^[38] Some locals have accused the UAE of attempting to takeover the UNESCO-protected island, a claim that Abu Dhabi denies. The UAE's presence on Socotra began with reconstruction projects following two destructive cyclones in 2015.

Political Developments

Aden Protesters Take Aim at UAE-Backed Security Forces

In the first week of March, there were demonstrations in Aden following the killing of a key witness in a child rape case involving members of the UAE-backed Security Belt forces. Raafat Danbaa was abducted from his home in the city's Mualla district on March 2, shot, and later died in hospital.^[39] Danbaa had testified against three Security Belt fighters, in a trial that saw two of the men convicted and sentenced to imprisonment. Yemen's interior ministry said it would task a commission with investigating Danbaa's murder.

On March 18, local media reported that protesters had blockaded the main road in Aden's Al-Buriqah district, following the death of a fish vendor in prison.^[40] Protesters

[35] "Release of Two Saudi soldiers kidnapped about two weeks ago in al-Jawf," Al-Masdar Online, March 25, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165748>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[36] "Tensions between government forces and tribal gunmen in al-Jawf after the abduction of two Saudi and six Yemeni soldiers," Al-Masdar Online, March 14, 2019, <https://www.almasdaronline.com/article/tensions-between-government-forces-and-tribal-gunmen-in-al-jawf-after-the-abduction-of-two-saudi-and-six-yemeni-soldiers>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[37] "Socotra.. Saudi forces deployment after mysterious death of senior officer at Governorate airport," Al-Masdar Online, March 30, 2019. <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165976>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[38] Eleonora Ardemagni, "Vying for Paradise? What Socotra Means for the UAE and Saudi Arabia," Middle East Centre Blog, London School of Economics, June 11, 2018, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2018/06/11/vying-for-paradise-what-socotra-means-for-the-uae-and-saudi-arabia/>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[39] "In Aden angry protests continue against the backdrop of the killing of the young man Raafat Danbaa," عدن.. "نواصل الاحتجاجات الغاضبة على خلفية مقتل الشاب رأفت دنيح," Aden News, March 4, 2019, <http://aden-news.net/aden-65982>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

[40] "Citizens close the streets of Al-Buriqah to protest the death of a detainee under torture in Al-Jala'a camp,"

claimed that Majid al-Dawabia, who had been held for months, was “tortured to death” and buried without his family’s knowledge. UAE-backed forces have de facto security control over Aden and Abu Dhabi has been accused of human rights abuses in prisons it runs in southern governorates, including allegations of arbitrary arrest and torture. On March 23, security forces shot dead three civilians and injured more in Al-Buriqah while trying to reopen a road blocked by demonstrators protesting the arrest of two men.^[41] Local sources said the clashes could have led to a “massive human disaster,” given their proximity to Aden’s oil refinery.

Tribesmen Clash With Saudi Troops in al-Mahra

In Yemen’s eastern governorate of al-Mahra, there were clashes around the Shahan border crossing with Oman after local tribesmen blocked the passage of Saudi shipping containers entering the country.^[42] A presidential committee was dispatched to the governorate to mediate between the parties, but departed on March 25 with no agreement reached, according to al-Masdar Online.^{[43][44]} There have been long-running sit-ins and demonstrations against Saudi Arabia’s military deployment in al-Mahra, which began in November 2017, despite the governorate remaining largely isolated from the direct impacts of the Yemen conflict. Local autonomy has been central to the protests, with anger often being directed against Saudi forces asserting control over various ports and border crossings. In November, at least one protester was shot dead and several more injured in demonstrations against the establishment of a coalition checkpoint near Nashton seaport, al-Anfaq district.^[45]

The al-Mahra and Socotra People’s General Council – a political group formed in the wake of the 2011 uprising that seeks to revive the al-Mahra Sultanate – held a meeting on March 27, which the Council’s chairman Sultan bin Isa al-Afrar billed as an effort to encourage unity between al-Mahra’s actors and foster stability.^[46] Al-Afrar has been one of the most prominent voices opposing Saudi presence in al-Mahra, but during the meeting he confirmed the council’s support for the Yemeni government and the Saudi-led military coalition. A group of tribal leaders issued a statement

“مواطنون يخلقون شوارع البريقة احتجاجاً على وفاة معتقل تحت التعذيب في معسكر الجلاء” Yemen Now, March 18, 2019, <https://yemen-now.com/news4994801.html>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

[41] “Civilians killed and wounded after security forces campaign to open road closed by protesters in Aden,” March 23, 2019, Al-Masdar Online, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165658>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

[42] “Al-Mahrah: Re-opening of border cargo port after closure due to clashes between the army and tribes against the Saudi presence,” Al-Masdar Online, March 13, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165275>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[43] “Presidential Commission arrives in Al-Mahrah after escalating tension between security forces and anti-Saudi presence tribes,” Al-Masdar Online, March 17, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165438>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[44] “An official talks about the fail the presidential commission to reach a formula that ends the tension in Al-Mahrah,” Al-Masdar Online, March 28, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165893>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[45] “Al-Mahrah: Protesters killed by security bullets after protesters protest against creation of security point,” Al-Masdar Online, November 14, 2018, <https://almasdaronline.com/article/al-mahrah-protesters-killed-by-security-bullets-after-protesters-protest-against-creation-of-security-point>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[46] “Sultan Abdullah bin Issa Al-Afar heads an extended meeting of elders and social figures and calls on them to maintain the stability of the skilled,” السلطان عبدالله بن عيسى آل عفرار يرأس لقاء موسع للشيوخ والشخصيات الإجتماعية ويدعوهم ”الحفاظ على استقرار المهرة“، March 27, 2019, Al-Moheet Press <https://almoheetpress.net/news9863.html>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

shortly after the meeting, however, saying that their voices were not represented during the meeting.^[47] Tribal opposition to Saudi Arabia's presence in al-Mahra is not unanimous; Riyadh first established influence among tribes in the governorate in the 1980s, which included offering Saudi citizenship to prominent sheikhs.

Saudi Arabia has launched a range of development projects in al-Mahra and claims that its security presence is focused on preventing weapons smuggling into Yemen.^[48] The establishment of military bases, takeover of sea and airports, and reports of a planned pipeline running from Saudi Arabia, through al-Mahra to Yemen's southeast coast, have raised concerns regarding Riyadh's long-term military and economic designs on the eastern governorate.^[49] Al-Mahra has historical ties to Oman and longstanding informal trading practices between the two are seen as being under threat by Saudi Arabia's military buildup in the governorate. There has also been a backlash to a growing presence in al-Mahra of adherents to the Salafist Dar al-Hadith school, which some locals claim is facilitated by Saudi Arabia and the pro-Saudi governor, Rageh Bakrit.^[50]

Houthi Authorities Announce Parliamentary Election Date

Houthi authorities announced that elections would be held on April 13 to fill empty seats in Yemen's parliament.^[51] There are currently 34 constituencies without a representative, half of which are in Houthi-controlled areas, where would-be candidates were asked to submit their requests to run through newly formed local committees. Despite not reaching the required minimal attendance, parliamentary sessions have continued in Sana'a since the Houthis took control of the capital.

At the end of March, reports in Yemeni and Emirati media quoting Yemeni lawmakers said that preparations were underway for a parliamentary session under President Hadi.^{[52][53]} While the Hadi government is confident that enough lawmakers can be gathered for a legal parliamentary session, this calculation likely includes members of the separatist Southern Transitional Council, which has set up its own rival legislative bodies.

[47] Elisabeth Kendall, Twitter Post, March 30, 2019, https://twitter.com/Dr_E_Kendall/status/1112014943103127552. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[48] "Saudi Arabia Launches 8 Projects, in Al-Mahra Governorate, Yemen," Saudi Press Agency, August 1, 2019, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/viewfullstory.php?lang=en&newsid=1792586>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[49] "Document reveals the intention of Riyadh to establish an oil port in eastern Yemen," وثيقة تكشف عزم الرياض إنشاء ميناء نفطي شرق اليمن, Arabi21, August 20, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2HS8Hej>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

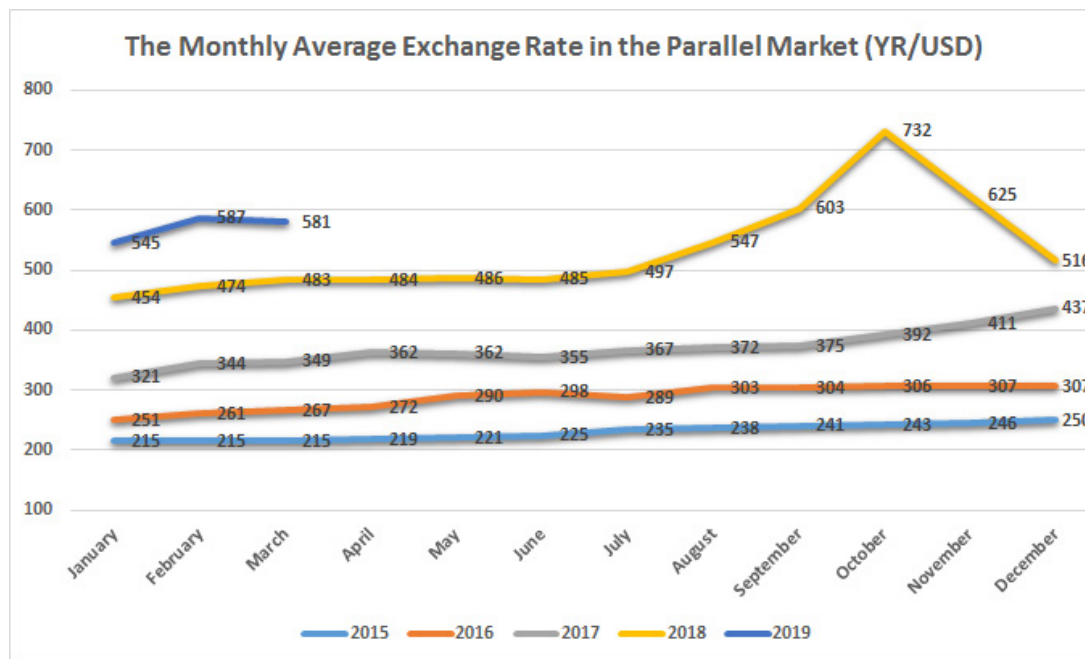
[50] "Meet the female activists standing up to fundamentalism in eastern Yemen," The Sunday Times, February 10, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/meet-the-female-activists-standing-up-to-fundamentalism-in-eastern-yemen-tdr5l8v9j>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[51] "Houthis decide next month to fill vacant parliamentary seats," الحوثيون يحددون الشهر المقبل موعداً لملء المقاعد البرلمانية, Al-Awsat, March 15, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2FDdePo>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

[52] "Parliamentarians confirms to Al-Masdar online that they have received a call for a meeting. Will the Council really be convened this time and where?" Al-Masdar Online, March 31, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/166028>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

[53] "Yemen's parliament to hold first session since civil war started," The National, April 1, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/yemen-s-parliament-to-hold-first-session-since-civil-war-started-1.843711>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

In February, President Hadi issued a directive to relocate the country's electoral commission to Aden and reiterated plans to call a parliamentary session after the Houthis announced their intention to hold elections.^[54] Yemen's last parliamentary elections took place in 2003 and no sessions have been held since the beginning of the conflict.



Source: Central Bank of Yemen; Sana'a Center Economic Unit

Economic Developments

Houthis Restrict Import Financing, Risking Major Humanitarian Fallout

At the beginning of March, Houthi authorities banned Yemeni banks from opening letters of credit (LCs) with the central bank in Aden for food and medicine importers headquartered in Houthi-controlled areas.^[55] Since June 2018, the central bank in Aden has been offering to underwrite the import of rice, wheat, sugar, milk, cooking oil, and certain types of medicine at a preferential exchange rate – which since late 2018 has been YR440 per US\$1 – from funds allocated from the US\$2 billion Saudi deposit.^[56] Although companies that are headquartered in Aden are exempt from the Houthi ban, the reality is that most food and medicine importers are headquartered in Sana'a.

[54] "Diplomacy Sinking at Hudaydah Port – The Yemen Review, February 2019" Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, March 7, 2019, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/7162>. Accessed, April 1, 2019.

[55] Sana'a Center interview on March 22, 2019.

[56] "Yemen at the UN – June 2018 Review," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, July 17, 2018, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/yemen-at-the-un/6262>. Accessed March 25, 2019.

If enforced, the ban will almost certainly increase the local market prices of food and medicine and put downward pressure on the value of the Yemeni rial. Importers unable to obtain the LCs underwritten by the Aden central bank will need to purchase US dollars from the market, where the market rate in March averaged YR570-580 per \$US1. Traders will inevitably pass these costs onto consumers, while increased demand in the market for foreign currency will drive down the value of the domestic currency and further erode local purchasing power. The ban will thus magnify the severity of Yemen's humanitarian crisis, already the worst in the world.

Houthis Continue Attempts to Undermine GoY Fuel Import Regulations

On March 24, the Houthi-run Yemen Petroleum Company (YPC) organized a protest by its employees in front of the United Nations office in Sana'a.^[57] YPC announced that the protest was to denounce fuel importation constraints associated with the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) and the Yemeni government's Decree 75.^[58]

Among the conditions of Decree 75 is that traders must provide three years of bank statements to the Yemeni government-appointed Economic Committee in order to be permitted to import fuel into Yemen. The Saudi-led military coalition is helping to enforce the committee's decisions regarding which ships may dock and offload fuel in Yemen. Many Houthi-associated traders only began importing fuel through Hudaydah port in 2016, and used money exchange companies to facilitate their fuel imports. They are not able to provide the requisite bank statements and thus under Decree 75 are barred from continuing to import fuel. In response, Houthi authorities have been attempting to both circumvent and undermine Decree 75.

Hadi Appoints Hafedh Mayad as Central Bank Governor

On March 20, President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi announced the appointment of Hafedh Mayad as the new governor of the central bank in Aden, replacing Mohammed Zammam.^[59] Mayad's experience includes six years as the chairman of the Cooperative and Agricultural Credit Bank (CAC Bank) in Sana'a (2004-2010), and his current positions as chairman of CAC International Bank in Djibouti (2012-present) and head of the Yemeni government-appointed Economic Committee, established in August 2018.^[60] Mayad is also a member of the Development Champions, a group of eminent

[57] Yemen Petroleum Company, March 24, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ypcye.OilNews/photos/a.1012954425382461/2434619376549285/?type=3&theater>. Accessed March 25, 2019.

[58] Yemen Petroleum Company, March 22, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ypcye.OilNews/photos/a.1012954425382461/2431395776871645/?type=3&theater>. Accessed March 25, 2019.

[59] "Republican Decree Appointing Hafedh Mayad Governor of the Central Bank of Yemen," Saba Net, March 20, 2019, <https://www.sabanew.net/viewstory/47167>. Accessed March 20, 2019.

[60] "The Yemen Review – August 2018," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, September 6, 2018, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/6394>. Accessed March 22, 2019.

Yemeni experts who regularly convene under a program run by the Sana'a Center and partner organizations. His appointment as governor brings to an end months of speculation over anticipated changes to the leadership of the central bank in Aden, owing to an alleged breakdown in the relationship between President Hadi and the outgoing governor, Zammam.

The relationship between Hadi and Zammam deteriorated after the latter spoke with the central bank governor in Sana'a, Mohammed Sayani, in a video conference call that was facilitated by the UK government, according to various high-level sources who spoke with the Sana'a Center. The call occurred in December 2018, while Zammam was in Amman, Jordan, for weeklong talks between officials from the central bank in Aden and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and while Sayani was attending the UN-sponsored peace talks in Sweden. Zammam conducted the phone call without prior authorization from Hadi, according to several sources who spoke with the Sana'a Center.

The following month, accusations of corruption emerged against the central bank in Aden.^[61] On January 20, Hafedh Mayad publicized a letter he sent to Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed calling for an investigation into the central bank in Aden's foreign currency purchases between November 4 and November 29, 2018.^[62]

It is unclear at this stage what the impact of Mayad's new appointment will be on the Economic Committee. The committee's primary responsibilities include the stabilization of the Yemeni rial and the implementation of Decree 75.^[63] One arrangement the Yemeni government is considering, according to Sana'a Center sources, is the integration of the work of the Economic Committee within either a new advisory body or the Supreme Economic Council, which the prime minister has reportedly been planning to reassemble since late 2018.

Three days into his tenure, Mayad announced that the central bank in Aden was preparing an emergency response plan to tackle currency instability in Yemen. Among the first steps, Mayad said the central bank in Aden would seek meetings with the boards of directors of Yemeni money exchange companies.^[64]

Mayad is the fourth person to govern the central bank in four years; given that Yemeni by-laws regarding the central bank stipulate that the governor's term should be five years – notwithstanding exceptional circumstances – the legality of President Hadi's turnover of the governorship is questionable.

[61] "Stockholm Agreement Meets Yemeni Reality – The Yemen Review, January 2019," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, February 11, 2019, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/7027#Corruption-Allegations-Against-Aden-Central-Bank>. Accessed March 22, 2019

[62] https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=241242340143182&id=100027722542809.

[63] "The Yemen Review – October 2018," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, November 10, 2018, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/6620>. Accessed March 22, 2019.

[64] Hafedh Mayad, March 23, 2019, https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=279096849691064&id=100027722542809. Accessed March 25, 2019.

Houthis Crack Down on Money Exchange Companies

On March 4 the Yemeni Exchangers Association (YEA) issued a statement expressing its concerns over the contradictory regulations the central banks in Aden and Sana'a have imposed on exchange companies. A prominent representative of a money exchange company who spoke with the Sana'a Center said if YEA members' concerns were not addressed they would close all their branches across Yemen in protest. According to one well-informed source, the Houthis responded to the YEA by threatening to permanently close any money exchange company that participated in the protest.^[65]

On March 7, local media reported that Houthi security had forced unlicensed money exchange companies in Sana'a to close.^[66] The report cited an official at the Sana'a central bank as saying the closures would be extended to all Houthi-held urban areas, and that unlicensed money exchangers would only be allowed to remain open in remote areas, where there is no licensed service provider.

TeleYemen Headquarters Moved to Aden

On March 12, state-run telecommunications company TeleYemen completed the transfer of its headquarters from Sana'a to Aden.^[67] According to a Sana'a-based source working in the telecommunications sector, Houthi authorities in Sana'a are expected to lose an estimated YR27 billion of the firm's annual government payments as a result of the company's relocation to Aden. As part of the procedure, the Yemeni government has informed Yemeni banks of the new personnel in charge in Aden and told them to reject any documentation provided by Sana'a-based officials.

Humanitarian Developments

Taiz Facing Water Crisis

The return of IDPs to Taiz and the approach of summer have exacerbated a growing water crisis in the city, the Associated Press (AP) reported in March.^[68] Prior to the current conflict Taiz had a relatively functional public water system which – though beset by corruption and the depletion of wells that led to intermittent shortages – generally delivered water to people's homes. With the advent of the ongoing conflict, however, the local authorities have lost the ability to operate the water network, leaving many residents dependent on distribution points run by private companies or charities.

[65] Sana'a Center interview on March 20, 2019.

[66] "The Houthis Close Exchange Shops in Sana'a," Al-Mushahid, March 7, 2019, <https://www.almushahid.net/?p=40575>. Accessed March 22, 2019.

[67] "Official...Transferring TeleYemen to Aden," Aden Time, March 12, 2019, <http://aden-tm.net/NDetails.aspx?contid=74655>. Accessed March 22, 2019.

[68] AP Archive, "Taiz water shortages could get worse," YouTube Video, March 10, 2019.

A humanitarian worker in Taiz told the Sana'a Center that prices for water have spiked in the last three months. A water truck carrying 5,500 liters of water used to cost 7,000 Yemeni rials but this price has doubled since the beginning of the year, the aid worker said. A decree from the Ministry of Local Authorities setting water prices has been ignored by water truck owners, who justify their prices by pointing to the difficulties they face in collecting water, he added. While water shortages are not new to Taiz, the situation worsened during the war when Houthi forces took control of al-Hima, where water wells are located, while wells in al-Dhabab were cut off by fighting, the humanitarian worker said.

Yemen is the most water-poor country in the world, and many projects seeking to address this crisis have been suspended due to the war, former Yemeni water and environment minister Abdulsalam Razaz Saleh told the Lobelog in March.^[69] Meanwhile solutions like desalination of seawater require stability and an end to the conflict, he said.

Infestation Threatens Red Sea Mills Grain Stores

Thousands of tons of grain stored in the Red Sea Mills near Hudaydah City is infested with insects, the World Food Programme (WFP) said in March.^[70] Due to the conflict the UN had lost access to the mills in September 2018. At that time they held 51,000 tons of grain, enough to feed 3.7 million people for a month. Following a negotiated agreement between the warring parties, a WFP team was able to visit the silos in February and carry out an assessment. WFP spokesman Herve Verhoosel said the grain would need to be fumigated before it could be milled for flour. He added that the WFP is awaiting clearance from local authorities to return to the mills and begin the process.

Save the Children Reports Spike in Suspected Cholera Cases

A surge in suspected cholera cases in March saw 40,000 new cases reported in two weeks, more than a third of whom were children, Save the Children reported on March 26. Cholera infected an average of 1,000 children each day in March, according to the organization, which warned that the arrival of heavy rains could worsen the spread of the outbreak.

The conflict-driven destruction of Yemen's sanitation system, the contamination of water supplies and the displacement of families – who are subsequently left without access to clean water – have created the “perfect conditions” for the rapid spread of cholera, Save the Children said. The group added that widespread malnutrition has diminished many people's immune systems and increased the fatality rate of the disease. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that the current spike in the recorded numbers could also be linked to early rains, increased willingness to seek treatment and better disease surveillance.

[69] Austin Bodetti, “Yemen Is Running Out Of Water,” LobeLog, March 20, 2019.

[70] “Infested Yemen food aid needs fumigation to feed millions: WFP,” France 24, March 20, 2019.

According to data from Yemen's Ministry of Public Health and Population, as of March 17 there were 108,889 suspected cases of cholera and 190 associated deaths in Yemen.

UNICEF reported in March that children living in protracted conflicts were almost three times more likely to die from diarrhoeal disease linked to unsafe water and sanitation than by violence directly linked to conflict. Children under five, meanwhile, are 20 times more likely to die from diarrhoeal disease due to unsafe water and sanitation than from violence.

UNICEF Announces Support for 136,000 Teachers and School Staff

On March 10, UNICEF announced that it has started paying cash incentives to teachers in Yemen who have not received salaries in over two years. The UN agency will pay \$50 monthly, in local currency, to 136,000 teachers and school staff to help keep classes for children running.^[71] UNICEF said initial payments had already reached almost 100,000 of the intended recipients. It added that, due to various conflict-related factors, some 2 million school-age children in Yemen are unable to attend classes.

Human Rights and War Crimes Developments

In Focus: Persecution of Baha'i Religious Minority in Yemen

March 21 marked Nowruz, the Baha'i New Year (also the Persian New Year), though celebrations were restrained in Yemen for the religious minority. Baha'is fear to meet, even privately, amid ongoing persecution and incitement against them by the armed Houthi movement, a Baha'i spokesperson told the Sana'a Center in March.

The Baha'i faith, a monotheistic religion, was founded in Iran in the mid-nineteenth century. Its roots are in the Babi religion, which was founded in the 1840s by Iranian merchant Ali Mohammed al-Shirazi, known as the Bab. Baha'is believe the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh – one of the Bab's followers and the eventual founder of Baha'ism – were manifestations of God. Persian authorities at the time accused the Bab of heresy and he was publicly executed in Iran in 1850. Bahá'u'lláh was also persecuted and imprisoned in Iran, before being exiled to Baghdad and later Constantinople. The Ottoman government exiled Bahá'u'lláh to a penal colony in Akka, Palestine in 1868, where he remained until his death in 1892. Until this day, Baha'is continue to face persecution in Iran, where they are routinely harassed, prosecuted and imprisoned for practicing their faith, and Iranian authorities regularly destroy their places of burial, according to Human Rights Watch.^[72] Iran's constitution does not recognize Baha'is as a religious minority.

[71] "To keep children in education, UNICEF starts incentives for school-based staff in Yemen," UNICEF, March 11, 2019.

[72] "Iran: Arrests, Harassment of Baha'is," Human Rights Watch, October 16, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/16/iran-arrests-harassment-bahais>. Accessed April 5, 2019.

Estimates of the Baha'i population in Yemen vary from one thousand to several thousand.^[73] It is believed that the Bab brought his teachings to Yemen during a visit to Mokha in 1844.^[74] Yemenis were also exposed to the Baha'i faith by the followers of Bahá'u'lláh who traveled through the Bab al-Mandeb Strait en route to visit Bahá'u'lláh in Palestine. Today, Baha'is are spread across the country, though with concentrations in Sana'a, Taiz, Hudaydah, and elsewhere. Baha'i spokesperson Abdullah al-Olofi told the Sana'a Center that while Baha'is were historically respected in Yemen due to their high levels of education, when awareness of the faith grew, some Baha'is lost prominent public sector jobs and members of the faith were excluded from government employment. Amnesty International also documented how they faced discrimination before the current conflict under late President Ali Abdullah Saleh.^[75]

The Baha'i faith preaches universal peace, the equality of the sexes, compulsory education, the abolition of economic inequality, and harmony between religion and science. Baha'i teachings call on followers to serve humanity and do community service in the goal of universal fellowship, and this has been a factor in their persecution in Yemen. "Our people are involved in community initiatives but unfortunately all of that was taken as accusations of making Muslims convert to Baha'ism," al-Olofi said. Indeed, in December 2013 the National Security Bureau in Sana'a arrested Baha'i leader Hamed bin Haydara, with Amnesty International saying he has been tortured in custody.^[76]

Since the Iran-backed armed Houthi movement took control of Sana'a in a coup in September 2014, discrimination against the Baha'is has escalated. On August 10, 2016, armed officers from Yemen's National Security Bureau arrested 65 men, women and children at a youth workshop in Houthi-controlled Sana'a in what Amnesty International described as "a blatant case of persecution of a minority faith."^[77] Their phones, documents and passports were confiscated, and they were only released after relatives paid fines, according to the Baha'i International Community, an NGO representing Baha'is globally.^[78]

On January 8, 2015, Houthi authorities charged bin Haydara with collaborating with Israel.^[79] The Baha'i Universal House of Justice is based in Haifa, in Israel, because

[73] "Yemen: Baha'i Adherent Faces Death Penalty," Human Rights Watch, April 1, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/01/yemen-bahai-adherent-faces-death-penalty>. Accessed April 1, 2016; "The Baha'i Community in Yemen: A brief history of the recent persecution," Baha'i International Community, August 2018, <https://www.bic.org/situation-in-yemen/background>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[74] "البهائيون في اليمن" ("Baha'is in Yemen"), Baha'is in Yemen, <http://www.bahaiye.org/AR/About/Default.aspx>. Accessed April 8, 2019.

[75] "Yemen: Fear of forcible return/possible POCs," Amnesty International, September 12, 2008,

[76] "Yemen: Huthi sentence 52-year-old Baha'i prisoner of conscience to death," Amnesty International, January 3, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/yemen-huthi-sentence-52-year-old-bahai-prisoner-conscience-death>. Accessed April 5, 2019.

[77] "Yemen: Huthi authorities must release detained Bahá'ís, end crackdown on minorities," Amnesty International, August 17, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/08/yemen-huthi-authorities-must-release-detained-bahais-end-crackdown-on-minorities/>. Accessed April 5, 2019.

[78] "The Baha'i Community in Yemen: A brief history of the recent persecution," Baha'i International Community, August 2018, <https://www.bic.org/situation-in-yemen/background>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[79] "Yemen: Baha'i Adherent Faces Death Penalty," Human Rights Watch, April 1, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/01/yemen-bahai-adherent-faces-death-penalty>. Accessed April 1, 2016.

Bahá'u'lláh lived, died and was buried in the area, prior to the establishment of the state of Israel. Bin Haydara was also charged with apostasy, insulting Islam and trying to convert Muslims to the Baha'i faith through charitable giving.

In April 2017, Houthi-Saleh authorities in Sana'a issued arrest orders for 25 Baha'is. The UN Special Rapporteur described the court summons and arrest orders as "an act of intimidation pressuring the Yemeni Baha'is to recant their faith."^[80] Five Baha'is, including tribal leader Walid Ayyash, were arrested by Houthi authorities in Sana'a and Hudaydah in May 2017. In October 2017, Ayyash's brother Akram Ayyash was arrested in a raid by Houthi security forces on a Baha'i gathering in Sana'a to celebrate a holy day, the Baha'i International Community reported.

On January 2, 2018, the Specialized Criminal Court in Sana'a sentenced Baha'i leader Hamed bin Haydara to death.^[81] The court also called for the dissolution of all Baha'i assemblies, the Baha'i International Community said. Bin Haydara is one of six Baha'is currently imprisoned by Houthi authorities. Another 19 Baha'is, including a woman and a child, have been forced into hiding with their families, according to the Baha'i International Community.^[82] These Baha'is are being tried in absentia on charges of apostasy and espionage, according to al-Olofi, who himself was arrested by Houthi authorities for three days in October 2018. The same judge who sentenced bin Haydara to death is presiding over the other trials, raising fears that more death sentences will be issued.

A Baha'i among the 19 on trial in absentia told the Sana'a Center that he and his family went into hiding when the armed Houthi movement began its campaign against Baha'is. Hundreds of Baha'is living in Houthi-controlled areas did the same, he said, adding that "many lost their jobs, their children did not go to school, all this because we fear that they will catch us." The charges facing him and other defendants are fabricated, he said, noting that they were the same charges that the Iranian government has used to persecute Baha'is for more than 50 years. "The fabrication of the charges is initiated by Iran and its leaders in coordination with the Houthis in Yemen to continue our persecution here," he said.

The claim that Baha'is are linked to the Israeli government or engaged in espionage is "a fantasy," he said. Haifa is a holy place to Baha'is because Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to the area by a decision of the Ottoman authorities in coordination with Iran; Baha'i holy places are in present-day Israel, as are Muslim, Jewish and Christian holy sites, he noted. "The Baha'i faith is a religion that calls for peace and love, and its principles are based on the oneness of Allah and that all the prophets and messengers are from one source of guidance, namely, Allah," he said. He urged the international community to protect Baha'is from injustice and oppression "because the situation is getting worse."

[80] "Yemen must stop persecution of Bahá'í community, urges UN expert on freedom of religion," UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, May 22, 2017.

[81] "Yemen: Huthis must quash death sentence of Baha'i prisoner of conscience," Amnesty International, January 3, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/01/yemen-huthis-must-quash-death-sentence-of-bahai-prisoner-of-conscience/>. Accessed April 5, 2018.

[82] "The Baha'i Community in Yemen: A brief history of the recent persecution," Baha'i International Community, August 2018, <https://www.bic.org/situation-in-yemen/background>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

The Baha'i International Community also says that Houthi persecution of Baha'is is directed by Iran. The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, has said that "the persistent pattern of persecution of the Baha'i community in Sana'a mirrors the persecution suffered by the Baha'is living in Iran."^[83]

Al-Olofi said that Baha'is in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen were no longer able to meet as a community, and that they lived under the constant surveillance of Houthi authorities. The Baha'i spokesperson said Baha'is had been increasingly targeted since a televised speech by Houthi leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi on March 23, 2018, in which he described the Baha'i faith as "satanic" and said Baha'is are "waging war on Islam and are sponsored and given freedom by Israel to incite Muslims in Yemen to convert."^[84] Al-Houthi urged Yemeni society to stand against Baha'is, a call that al-Olofi said gave a green light to all Yemenis to attack and harass Baha'is.

Meanwhile, the Houthi-controlled Ministry of Information has held workshops to train Yemenis to respond to the Baha'is' "war of doctrine" through traditional and social media, while incitement against Baha'is has also been broadcast on Yemeni TV and radio, the Baha'i International Community reported.^[85]

While the main threat facing Baha'is in Yemen comes from the armed Houthi movement, Baha'is have also been targeted by other extremist groups. Abdullah al-Zindani has called on all Islamic groups to campaign against Baha'is and said they were planted in Yemen by the United States.^[86] Al-Zindani's father is Abdulmajid al-Zindani, who played a key role in the formation of the Islah party.

Despite the rising persecution, few Baha'is have left Yemen, al-Olofi said. He urged authorities to respect Baha'is as Yemenis who have rights enshrined in the constitution, which states that Yemen should abide by international human rights law. He called for freedom of religion in Yemen, which he said most Yemenis believed in. "We need to be recognized as Yemeni citizens who have rights," he said.

UN: 22 Civilians Killed in Hajjah Airstrike

An airstrike by the Saudi-led military coalition killed at least 22 civilians in the Kushar district of Hajjah, UN Humanitarian Coordinator Lise Grande said on March 11.^[87] Ten women and 12 children were killed, Grande said, while 30 people, including 14 children, were injured. Some of the injured children were sent to hospitals in Abs and Sana'a, she added.

[83] "Yemen must stop persecution of Bahá'í community, urges UN expert on freedom of religion," UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, May 22, 2017.

[84] "كلمة السيد عبدالملك بدرالدين الحوثي في جمعة رجب ذكرى دخول اليمنيين الإسلام"

[85] "The Baha'i Community in Yemen: A brief history of the recent persecution," Baha'i International Community, August 2018, <https://www.bic.org/situation-in-yemen/background>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[86] Abdullah al-Zandani, Facebook post, September 7, 2016, 1:39p.m., https://mobile.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1168232203215301&id=248294641875733&_rdc=1&_rdr Accessed April 1, 2019.

[87] "Twenty-two civilians killed, including children, in north Yemen: U.N.," Reuters, March 11, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/twenty-two-civilians-killed-including-children-in-north-yemen-un-idUSKBN1QS27W>. Accessed March 22, 2019.

The Kushar district witnessed fierce clashes in early March, before Houthi forces defeated local tribesmen and took control of the area (For more information, see: “Houthis Subdue Tribal Uprising in Hajjah”).

Other Human Rights and War Crimes Developments in Brief:

- **March 10:** Women held a demonstration in Sana’a to protest the security chaos in the city and the rise in abductions of girls.^[88] According to al-Masdar Online, there have been repeated disappearances of girls in Sana’a, including a 12-year-old who disappeared on her way home from school on March 8.
- **March 11:** The Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations said it had observed 5,113 cases of the recruitment of child soldiers in Yemen in the past four years.^[89]
- **March 11:** Some 3,000 detainees are held in the Houthi-run prison in Dhamar, south Sana’a, making the facility the second largest prison used by the armed Houthi movement, according to al-Masdar Online.^[90]
- **March 12:** Ten Yemeni journalists are facing trial at a special criminal court in Sana’a charged with collaborating with enemy forces, which carries the death penalty, according to Reporters Without Borders. They are among 16 journalists detained by the armed Houthi movement.^[91]
- **March 14:** Two children were returned to their families after being held hostage by tribesmen in Marib for five years.^[92] The children, who are the grandsons of a businessman from Taiz, were released after mediation by their mother and an activist, Laila Thawr.
- **March 14:** The Abductees’ Mothers Association held a demonstration in Ibb to demand the release of their sons who were detained by the armed Houthi movement.^[93] The association said there have been 563 cases of attempted financial extortion concerning the detainees.^[94]

[88] “وقفة احتجاجية نسائية في صنعاء تنديداً بالانفلات الأمني واختطاف الفتيات”

[89] “تحالف حقوقي: رصدنا تجنيد أكثر من 5 آلاف طفل منذ بدء الحرب في اليمن” (“Human Rights Coalition: We have reported the recruitment of more than 5,000 children since the start of the war in Yemen”), al-Masdar Online, March 12, 2019, <https://www.almasdaronline.com/articles/165201>. Accessed March 22, 2019.

[90] “منطقة عبور المسافرين التي تحولت إلى مثلث برمودا..” المصدر أونلاين “يتتبع خارطة السجون الحوثية في ذمار (تقرير خاص)” (“The transit area of travelers that turned into the Bermuda Triangle..” al-Masdar Online “tracks the map of Houthi prisons in Dhamar (Special Report).”), al-Masdar Online, March 11, 2019.

[91] “Ten Yemeni journalists held by Houthis now face possible execution,” Reporters without Borders, March 12, 2019, <https://rsf.org/en/news/ten-yemeni-journalists-held-houthis-now-face-possible-execution>. Accessed April 4, 2019.

[92] “مأرب: وساطة تنجح بإعادة طفلين إلى أسرتهما بعد 5 سنوات من الإحتجاز” (“Marib: Mediation succeeds in returning two children to their families after five years of detention”), The Yemen, March 14, 2019.

[93] “أمهات المختطفين في إب: تعرض 563 من أسر المختطفين للابتزاز المالي” (“Mothers of Abductees in Ibb: 563 abducted families were subjected to financial extortion,” al-Masdar Online, March 14, 2019.

[94] Abductees Mothers Association, Twitter post, March 14, 2019, 3:45 a.m., <https://twitter.com/abducteesmother/status/1106144387397009409?s=20>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

- **March 18:** An aid worker from Action Against Hunger was killed in shelling in Hudaydah City.^[95]
- **March 19:** Activists in Yemen reported that Houthi authorities informed bus companies that they were barred from issuing tickets to women traveling without a mahram, or male member of their immediate family as an escort.
- **March 24:** Médecins Sans Frontières said it had treated 49 wounded and received two dead over four days of intense fighting in Taiz City which forced a public hospital to close.^[96]
- **March 26:** Seven people were killed when a missile hit a petrol station near a hospital in a rural area 100 kilometers north of Sa'ada, Save the Children reported.^[97] Four children, a health worker and a security guard were among those killed.
- **April 1:** The Abductees Mothers Association issued a statement calling for the release of dozens of “academics, journalists and students” it said were being held in a political security prison by Houthi authorities in Sana'a.^[98] The statement said the prisoners were being tortured, held in degrading and deplorable conditions, and denied medical care.

[95] “Yemen: Action Against Hunger Colleague Killed in Violence in Hodeidah.” Action Against Hunger USA, March 19, 2019.

[96] “People unable to access lifesaving care amid heavy fighting in Taiz city,” Medecins Sans Frontieres, March 24, 2019, <https://www.msf.org/yemen-forty-nine-wounded-and-two-dead-after-four-days-heavy-fighting-taiz-city>. Accessed March 25, 2019.

[97] “Seven killed in bombing of Save the Children supported hospital in Yemen,” Save the Children, March 26, 2019, <https://www.savethechildren.net/article/seven-killed-bombing-save-children-supported-hospital-yemen>. Accessed March 31, 2019.

[98] Abductees Mothers Association, Twitter post, April 2, 2019, 12:49 a.m., <https://twitter.com/abducteesmother/status/1112985490645553158?s=20>. Accessed April 4, 2019.

International Diplomatic Developments

In the United States

White House Revokes US Military's Drone Strike Reporting Requirement

The United States will no longer provide reports on some drone strikes it conducts outside “areas of active hostilities,” including death tolls. On March 6, the White House revoked part of the reporting requirement, which was introduced in 2016 under the Obama administration as an effort to improve transparency around the US drone campaign.^[99]

The State Department told the Washington Post that the reports were redundant given requirements on civilian casualty reports mandated by legislation passed in Congress last year.^{[100][101]} It added that policy amounted to “superfluous reporting requirements, requirements that do not improve government transparency, but rather distract our intelligence professionals from their primary mission.” The chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Rep. Adam Schiff, (D-CA), criticized the move, calling it a “troubling retreat from transparency,” and added that he would pursue mandatory reporting in the drafting of the Intelligence Authorization Act – the annual funding bill for intelligence activities – later this year.^[102]

By revoking section 3 of Executive Order 13732, deaths resulting from some US strikes can now go unreported in Yemeni governorates not designated as areas of “active hostilities” – which in practice will mean all but certain parts of Abyan, Shabwah and al-Bayda.^[103] This will diminish oversight and room for scrutiny of these controversial operations in Yemen; Marib and Hadramawt governorates, for example, have been frequent targets for strikes since the US drone war in Yemen began in 2002. In that

[99] “Executive Order on Revocation of Reporting Requirement,” March 6, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-revocation-reporting-requirement/>. Accessed March 14, 2019.

[100] Missy Ryan, “Trump administration alters Obama-era bill on civilian casualties in U.S. airstrikes,” The Washington Post, March 6, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/white-house-weakens-obama-era-rule-on-civilian-casualties/2019/03/06/b2940dfe-4031-11e9-9361-301ffb5bd5e6_story.html. Accessed March 14, 2019.

[101] H.R.2810–National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2810/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22national+defense+authorization+act%22%5D%7D&r=2>. Accessed March 14, 2019.

[102] “Schiff Statement on Trump Cancellation of U.S. Report on Civilian Deaths in Drone Strikes,” U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, March 6, 2019, <https://intelligence.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=613>, Accessed March 14, 2019.

[103] “United States Policy on Pre- and Post-Strike Measures To Address Civilian Casualties in U.S. Operations Involving the Use of Force,” copy published in the Federal Register of the National Archives, originally signed on July 1, 2016, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-07-07/pdf/2016-16295.pdf>. Accessed March 14, 2019.

time US drones have killed more than 1,000 people in the country, including at least 200 civilians.^[104] A study by the Associated Press found that civilians accounted for nearly a third of total deaths from US drone strikes in 2018.^[105] Pressure is also being exerted in Yemen over these extrajudicial killings; a March report from The National Commission to Investigate Alleged Human Rights Violations detailed civilian casualties as a result of drone strikes since 2015 and claimed that these operations are carried out by the US “in partnership” with the Yemeni government.^[106]

The use of drone strikes against US-designated terrorist suspects began under President George W. Bush in the context of the post-9/11 “War on Terror”. President Barack Obama introduced legislation aimed at improving transparency, but simultaneously expanded the campaign, overseeing a tenfold increase in strikes worldwide compared with his predecessor.^[107]

The incumbent President Donald Trump has gradually been whittling down measures to improve oversight of US drone strikes and assessments of civilian casualty risks. During his first months in office, Trump reportedly declared parts of three Yemeni governorates — Abyan, Shabwah and al-Bayda — “areas of active hostilities.”^[108] Not only did this permit strikes without White House authorization, but the Defense Department was also no longer required to submit target lists for review by other government agencies — drastically reducing civilian oversight. In late 2017, Trump reportedly removed guidance on targets — opening the way for drones to strike low-level militants who pose only a questionable threat to US national security.^[109]

The State Department has said that new requirements for civilian casualty reporting make the Obama-era requirements redundant. Yet Larry Lewis, a former State Department adviser who helped create the executive order requiring the reporting, said that the decision creates a “transparency gap” as this new legislation obligates only the Defense Department to submit reports, excluding other US agencies or bodies involved in the use of force.^[110] This type of oversight is particularly important now; in March 2017, the Wall Street Journal said that Trump had expanded the CIA’s authorization to conduct drone strikes, reversing Obama-era efforts to transfer permissions solely to the US military.^[111]

[104] Ibid.

[105] Maggie Michael and Maad al-Zikry, “Hidden toll of US drone strikes in Yemen: Nearly a third of deaths are civilians, not al-Qaida,” The Associated Press (via The Military Times), November 14, 2018 <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/11/14/hidden-toll-of-us-drone-strikes-in-yemen-nearly-a-third-of-deaths-are-civilians-not-al-qaida/>. Accessed March 27, 2019.

[106] “Sixth report: on the work of the National Commission to investigate allegations of human rights violations,” التقرير السادس : عن أعمال اللجنة الوطنية للتحقيق في ادعاءات انتهاكات حقوق الإنسان, The National Commission to Investigate Alleged Human Rights Violations, March 28, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2uH8YrC> Accessed April 2, 2019.

[107] “Obama’s Covert Drone War in Numbers: Ten Times More Strikes than Bush,” The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, January 17, 2017, <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-01-17/obamas-covert-drone-war-in-numbers-ten-times-more-strikes-than-bush>. Accessed March 26, 2019.

[108] Charlie Savage and Eric Schmitt, “Trump Administration Is Said to Be Working to Loosen Counterterrorism Rules,” The New York Times, March 12, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/12/us/politics/trump-loosen-counterterrorism-rules.html>. Accessed March 14, 2019.

[109] Luke Hartig, “Trump’s New Drone Strike Policy: What’s Any Different? Why It Matters,” Just Security, September 22, 2017, <https://www.justsecurity.org/45227/trumps-drone-strike-policy-different-matters/>. Accessed March 14, 2019.

[110] Larry Lewis, “Reflecting on the Civilian Casualty Executive Order: What Was Lost and What Can Now Be Gained,” Just Security, March 12, 2019, <https://www.justsecurity.org/63202/reflecting-civilian-casualty-executive-order/>. Accessed March 25, 2019.

[111] “Trump gives CIA authority to conduct drone strikes: WSJ,” Reuters, March 14, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com>.

Officially ending this reporting requirement may not be in itself of great consequence, however, as the Defense Department did not issue such a report in 2017.

Senate Follows House in Voting to End US Involvement In Yemen War

On March 13, the Senate voted 54-46 to end US military support for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.^[112] The vote followed the House of Representatives passing a similar bill in February.^[113] Senate Joint Resolution 7 invokes the War Powers Act and instructs the president to remove US forces from “hostilities in or affecting Yemen” unless Congress provides authorization otherwise.^[114] This is the second time legislation invoking the War Powers Act regarding the Pentagon’s role in Yemen has passed the Senate; another bill was voted through in December of last year, but did not make it further before the end of the congressional session.

US assistance includes intelligence support, training, and maintenance of coalition aircraft. The resolution specifies mid-air refueling as one of the prohibited activities, and while this support ended last year there is currently no legislation to prevent its resumption.

The White House has previously said that it would override any attempts by Congress to curb US involvement in Yemen. In comments to reporters shortly after the vote, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the legislation would be a gift to Iran and that ending assistance to the coalition would “prolong the conflict by handicapping our partners in the fight.”^[115]

The House of Representatives will have to approve the Senate version of the bill before it moves to President Trump’s desk. Regardless, the legislation’s impact is likely to be symbolic rather than legal; there is not the majority in Congress to override an almost-certain presidential veto, and there is a debate over whether US actions in Yemen qualify as “hostilities.”

com/article/us-usa-trump-cia-drones-idUSKBN16K2SE. Accessed March 14, 2019.

[112] Catie Edmondson, “Senate Votes Again to End Aid to Saudi War in Yemen, Defying Trump,” The New York Times, March 13, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/13/us/politics/yemen-saudi-war-senate.html>. Accessed March 24, 2019.

[113] “Diplomacy Sinking at Hodaydah Port – The Yemen Review, February 2019,” The Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, March 7, 2019, <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/7162#New-Fronts-Open-in-Congress-Targeting-US-policy-in-Yemen>. Accessed March 25, 2019.

[114] “S.J.Res.7 – A joint resolution to direct the removal of United States Armed Forces from hostilities in the Republic of Yemen that have not been authorized by Congress,” <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/7?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22yemen%22%5D%7D&r=3&s=1>. Accessed March 24, 2019.

[115] Pompeo, Mike. Twitter post, March 15, 2019, 1:06pm. <https://twitter.com/secpompeo/status/1106647775368888320?s=12>. Accessed March 26, 2019.

In Europe

UK Special Forces Reportedly Injured Fighting Houthis

The UK government in March admitted its indirect support of the Saudi-led aerial campaign in Yemen, and a UK newspaper reported that elite British troops were fighting in Yemen.

Responding to a written question by Labour MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Minister for the Armed Forces Mark Lancaster said that members of the UK's Royal Air Force on secondment to BAE Systems in Saudi Arabia had "provided routine engineering support" for Saudi aircraft militarily engaged in Yemen.^[116] RAF staff had also provided "generic training support" to aircrew from the Royal Saudi Air Force, Lancaster said. RAF personnel were not, however, involved in planning or loading weapons for operational sorties, the minister said.

On March 23, the UK's Mail on Sunday reported that up to 30 British Special Boat Service (SBS) forces were engaged in combat operations against Houthi forces in Sa'ada governorate.^[117] An SBS source told the newspaper that the elite forces' principal role was training and mentoring, but that troops had also engaged in firefights. According to the report, at least five British soldiers have been injured in combat. Mark Field, Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific at the Foreign Office, said he would investigate the allegations.^[118]

Germany Extends Saudi Arms Export Ban But Exempts Joint EU Ventures

After weeks of heated debates between the governing coalition parties in Germany, Berlin extended its halt on arms exports to Saudi Arabia in March, while making an exception for joint EU armament projects.^[119] On March 28, German government spokesperson Steffen Seibert announced that the suspension of arms exports to Saudi Arabia, imposed in October 2018 after the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, would be renewed for six months until September 30. Until then, no new arms export licenses will be granted.

[116] Lloyd Russell-Moyle, "Saudi Arabia: Military Aid: Written question – 228761," UK Parliament, March 5, 2019, <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-03-05/228761/>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[117] Marc Nicol, "Our secret dirty war: Five British Special Forces troops are wounded in Yemen while 'advising' Saudi Arabia on their deadly campaign that has brought death and famine to millions," Daily Mail, March 23, 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6843469/Five-British-Special-Forces-troops-wounded-Yemen-advising-Saudi-Arabia-campaign.html>. Accessed March 31, 2019.

[118] "Minister Pledges To Investigate Allegations Linked To UK Special Forces In Yemen," Forces Network, March 27, 2019, <https://www.forces.net/news/special-forces/minister-pledges-investigate-allegations-linked-uk-special-forces-yemen>. Accessed March 31, 2019.

[119] "Bundesregierung verlängert Rüstungsembargo gegen Saudi-Arabien um sechs Monate," Spiegel Online, March 29, 2019, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/bundesregierung-verlaengert-ruestungsexportstopp-fuer-saudi-arabien-um-6-monate-a-1260215.html>. Accessed 30 March, 2019.

Existing arms export licenses for joint European projects will be extended until the end of 2019, but assembled weapons systems are barred from being delivered to Saudi Arabia or the UAE during this period.

This arrangement follows pressure on Berlin from France and the UK. France's ambassador to Germany, Anne-Marie Descôtes, in a recent working paper said the German export control system was unpredictable and harmed "our bilateral cooperation in the field of defense."^[120] Descôtes said Germany's ban on arms exports to Saudi Arabia damaged the work of French and European companies, some of whom had been waiting for the delivery of German components for joint weapons projects for more than a year. German arms export policies were also discussed during UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt's three-day visit to Gulf countries in March.^[121] During a meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh on March 2, Hunt distanced himself from German restrictions on arms to Saudi Arabia, according to a report by Intelligence Online.^[122]

BAE Systems plc, a British multinational defense company, relies on arms sales to Saudi Arabia, the report noted. BAE Systems holds a 37.5 percent share of the European missile producer MBDA, whose sale of Meteor missiles to Riyadh may be affected by the German ban. The propulsion systems for the Meteor missile are built in Germany.

Court Orders Berlin to Investigate US Base Over Drone Campaign

On March 19, a German court ruled that the government must take measures to determine the legality of US drones strikes conducted with the assistance of an American air base in Germany.^[123]

The lawsuit was filed by the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights on behalf of three Yemeni nationals whose relatives were killed in a US drone strike in Hadramawt in 2012.^[124] Their claim that Germany was complicit in the lethal strike had been dismissed by a lower court.

The Muenster Administrative court on March 19 said that evidence suggested the Ramstein US air base played a "central role" in relaying flight control data used for

[120] Anne-Marie Descôtes, "Vom 'German-free' zum gegenseitigen Vertrauen," Federal Academy for Security Policy, March 26, 2019, <https://www.baks.bund.de/de/arbeitspapiere/2019/vom-german-free-zum-gegenseitigen-vertrauen>. Accessed 30 March, 2019.

[121] Patrick Wintour, "Hunt begins Gulf visit in attempt to salvage Yemen peace plan," The Guardian, March 1, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/01/jeremy-hunt-begins-gulf-visit-yemen-peace-plan-saudi-arabia-khashoggi>. Accessed 30 March, 2019.

[122] "Britain tries to get back in with Gulf palaces and armies," Intelligence Online, March 20, 2019, <https://www.intelligenceonline.com/government-intelligence/2019/03/20/britain-tries-to-get-back-in-with-gulf-palaces-and-armies,108349771-eve>.

[123] "German court hands partial victory to critics of U.S. drone deaths in Yemen," Reuters, March 19, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-germany/german-court-hands-partial-victory-to-critics-of-us-drone-deaths-in-yemen-idUSKCN1R025A>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[124] "Jemeniten verklagen Deutschland. Welche Rolle spielt Ramstein im US-Drohnenkrieg?" ("Yemenis sue Germany. What role does Ramstein play in the US drone war?")

drone strikes in Yemen. A 2015 report by The Intercept called Ramstein Air Base the “high-tech heart of America’s drone program,” citing US intelligence documentation, which they said showed the communication architecture supporting the strikes.^[125] The court ordered the German government to determine if US drone strikes controlled by the air base complied with international law, and to pressure the US to abide by international law if necessary. The case is to be reviewed by the Federal Administrative Court, and the German government said it would study the ruling.

Other International Diplomatic Developments

Southern Transitional Council Leader Visits UK, Russia

In March, the head of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), Aidarous Al-Zubaidi, visited the UK and Russia. Al-Zubaidi met with UK parliamentarians in London on March 6 and with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov in Moscow on March 19.^[126] The STC’s UK parliamentary visits were facilitated by the British-based organization Independent Diplomat, assisted by the public relations firm Quatro, which was enlisted by the UAE. The STC delegation discussed the movement’s aspirations for southern independence and lobbied for their inclusion in the UN-led peace process. On March 20, the Russian ambassador to Yemen, Vladimir Dedushkin, met with Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed in Aden, and said Moscow planned to reopen a consulate in Aden, the capital of the internationally recognized Yemeni government.^[127]

Malaysian, Indonesian Captives Freed after Omani Mediation

In March, Oman helped secure the release of an Indonesian and a Malaysian held captive in Yemen, the state-run Oman News Agency reported.^[128]

Oman reached an agreement with authorities in Sana’a for the captives’ release at the request of the Indonesian and Malaysian governments, the report said. They were transferred to Oman on March 11 to be repatriated to their countries. Oman has previously mediated the releases of prisoners held by the armed Houthi movement in Yemen.

[125] Jeremy Scahill, “Germany is the Tell-Tale Heart of America’s Drone War,” The Intercept, April 17, 2015, <https://theintercept.com/2015/04/17/ramstein/>. Accessed March 19, 2019.

[126] Adalah Yenen, “Shady M. Qubaty moderating Adalah’s panel in the UK Parliament on The Rule of Law in Yemen,” YouTube Video, March 7, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMOgouMzrm4>. Accessed April 1, 2019; “President Al-Zubaidi holds a meeting with the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Baghdanov,” Southern Transitional Council Official Website, <http://en.stcaden.com/news/8569>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

[127] Mazen AbdulMalek Saeed, Twitter post, March 20, 2019, 10:53 a.m.

[128] “The Sultanate Assists in Reaching Agreement with Yemeni Authorities for Return of Indonesian, Malaysian Citizens,” Oman News Agency, March 11, 2019, https://www.omannews.gov.om/ona_eng/index.html#/searchlabel3/379859. Accessed April 4, 2019.

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