



The Yemen Review

March 2022

Ramadan Truce Faces Uphill Struggle

March 2022



The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies

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

Cover Photo:

Amid a fuel crisis gripping Yemen, smugglers in Taiz make their way March 9, 2022, through a backroad in Al-Selw district from government to Houthi territory. A new Ramadan cease-fire calls for allowing tankers to offload fuel in the Houthi-held port of Hudaydah. //Sana'a Center photo by

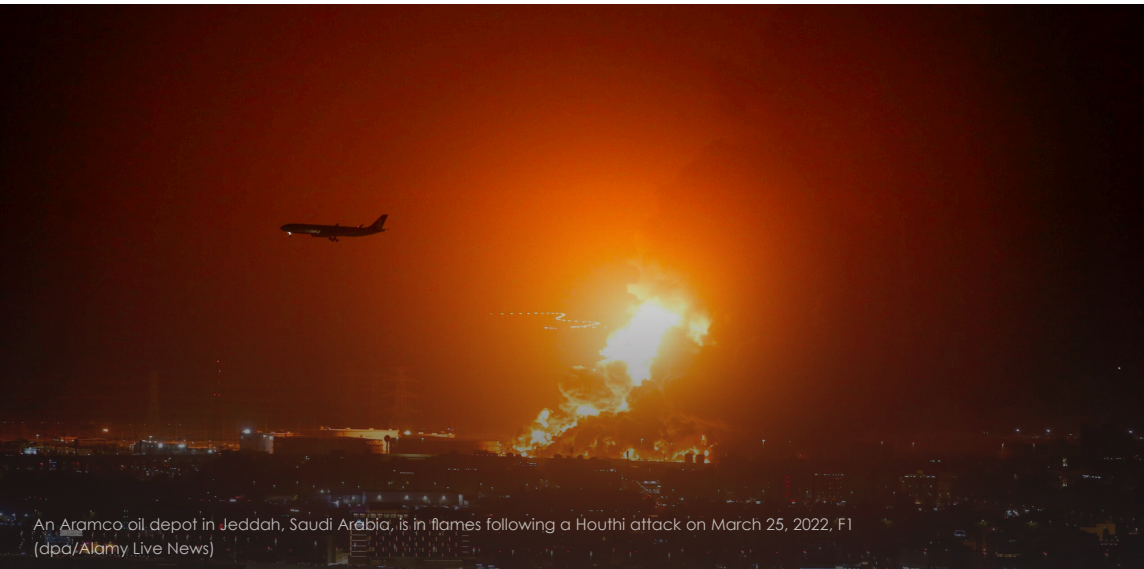
Ahmed Al Basha

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Executive Summary

March saw an escalation in cross-border attacks between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, with Houthi missiles and drones targeting Saudi oil and gas infrastructure, and the kingdom responding with airstrikes on Houthi-held areas in northern Yemen. However, the month ended on a hopeful note, with the warring parties declaring that they were entering, for the first time in more than seven years of war, a nationwide cease-fire. The truce, which commenced on April 2, the first day Ramadan, is set to last two months and includes a halt to military operations and cross-border attacks, in addition to the easing of coalition restrictions that would reopen Sana'a airport to commercial flights and allow fuel tankers to resume deliveries to the Houthi-held port of Hudaydah. Despite multiple early accusations of violations, there is hope that the cease-fire will provide Yemenis a reprieve from both the fighting and the three-month long fuel crisis that has gripped the country. The cease-fire also provides breathing space for peace consultations among anti-Houthi parties, brought together in Riyadh in late March and early April under the auspices of the six-state Gulf Cooperation Council.



An Aramco oil depot in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, is in flames following a Houthi attack on March 25, 2022, F1 (dpa/Alamy Live News)

Military and Security

A March wave of Houthi strikes on Saudi Arabian energy installations and retaliatory coalition airstrikes stopped, at least temporarily, with the April 1 announcement of the first **nationwide truce** of the war. The cease-fire took effect April 2, the start of the holy month of Ramadan, and was agreed to last two months, during which time military operations, including cross-border attacks, would halt and blockades on Hudaydah port and Sana'a airport would ease.

The truce followed a month of an intensified air war. Houthi authorities said their missile and drone strikes were aimed at ending the **Saudi-led coalition** blockade on Houthi-controlled northern Yemen – a set of trade and travel restrictions that prevent the Houthis from controlling access to northern sea and air ports – and in particular blaming the prohibition on **ships from offloading fuel** at Hudaydah port for an ongoing fuel crisis (see: '**Gasoline and Cooking Gas Prices Continue to Spike**'). The **text** of the cease-fire specified that 18 fuel vessels would be given access during the truce period and two commercial flights a week would operate from Sana'a to Jordan and Egypt. The parties also agreed to discuss the opening of roads in Taiz and some other regions.

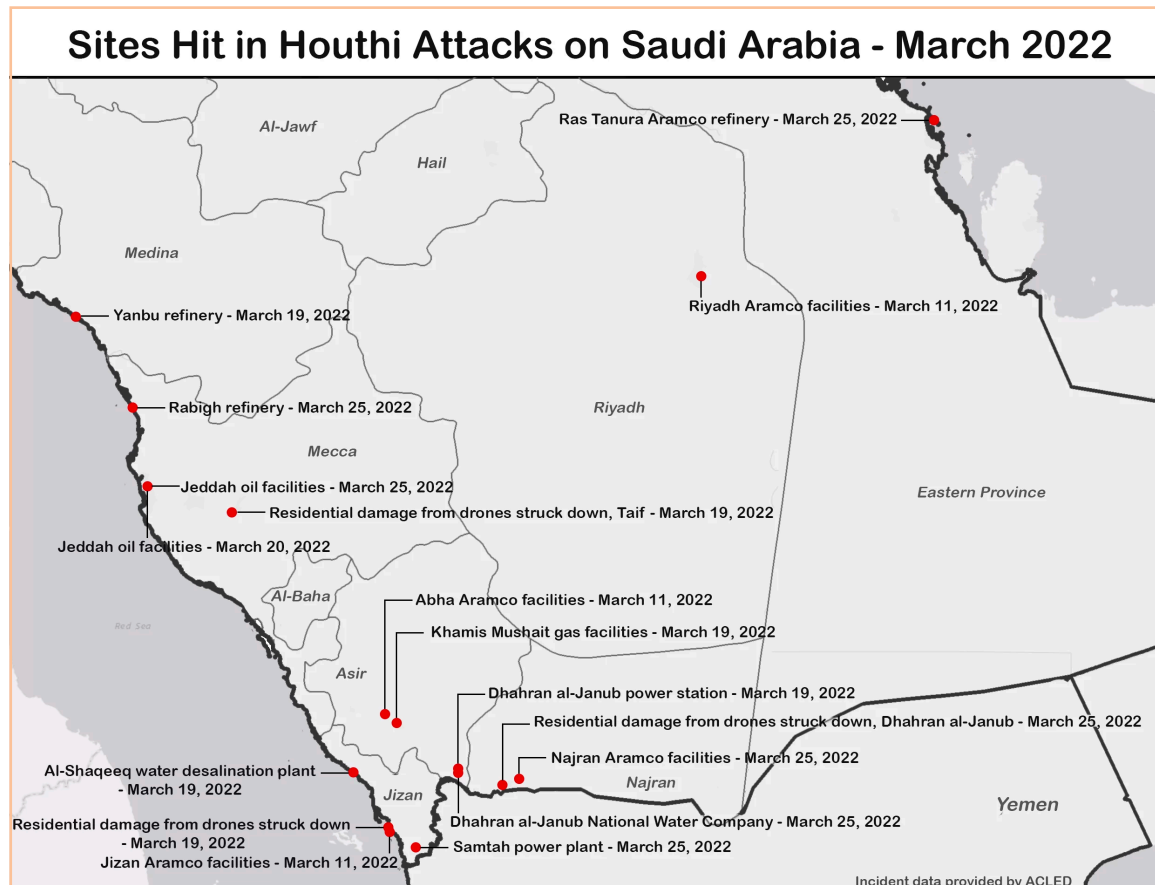
Southern governorates also experienced political violence throughout March, including abductions and assassinations by Islamic militants. Coalition airstrikes continued with their shift toward Hajjah in an effort to dislodge Houthi forces from the Saudi border.

Houthis Hit Saudi Arabian Energy Facilities

Houthi forces **attempted to hit Aramco facilities** in Riyadh, Abha and Jizan on March 11, which Saudi Arabia said **caused a small fire at a refinery in Riyadh**. On March 20, Saudi energy and desalination facilities were struck with **missiles and drones**, causing a temporary drop in output at a refinery but no casualties. Attacks targeted a petroleum products distribution terminal in the southern Jizan region, a natural gas plant and the Yasref refinery in the Red Sea port of Yanbu, as well as a water desalination plant in Al-

Shaqeeq, a power station in Dhahran al-Janub and a gas facility in Khamis Mushait. Later on March 20, another Aramco distribution plant was attacked in Jeddah, leading to a fire in one of the tanks, according to the Saudi-led coalition. An [Associated Press report](#) suggested this was the same oil storage tank – at the North Jeddah Bulk Plant, near the city's international airport – that was hit in November 2020.

Houthi forces struck the same Aramco site [again on March 25](#), the night before the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix in Jeddah, causing a fire in two storage tanks but no casualties. A Houthi military spokesman said the Ras Tanura and Rabigh refineries had also been targeted, and Saudi Arabia said a missile had caused a limited fire at an electricity distribution plant in Jizan. On March 26, the coalition announced it had hit targets in Sana'a and the west coast in response, including [water-borne IED manufacturing facilities](#) in Salif and Hudaydah ports and a [weapons depot](#) in Sana'a city. The UN said the airstrikes [damaged its staff residential compound](#) in Sana'a. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken issued a number of public statements condemning the March attacks on Saudi energy targets.



Ahead of the Ramadan truce, which followed weeks of international efforts, including by the US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking and UN special envoy Hans Grundberg, each side offered up brief unilateral cease-fires. On March 20, the coalition paused its military actions for two days in what it said was an effort to encourage the Houthis to join Gulf Cooperation Council-led peace consultations in Saudi Arabia that began March 29 in Riyadh. But [airstrikes resumed](#) on Houthi positions in Marib, Al-Jawf and Sa'ada

governorates as Houthi attacks continued along with the Houthis' refusal to attend the Riyadh talks. On March 26, the Houthis announced their own three-day suspension of air attacks on Saudi Arabia and ground operations in Marib, which they said could continue if airstrikes ended and the blockade – a reference to restrictions at Hudaydah port and the closure of Sana'a airport – was lifted.

On March 29, the coalition unilaterally announced a further **cessation of operations**, which appeared to be a precursor to the bilateral agreement Grundberg was finalizing. That announcement made no mention of the blockade – the issue over which previous cease-fire efforts have stalled. The Houthis have demanded the restrictions be lifted before agreeing to a cease-fire, while the coalition wants both implemented at the same time to prevent Sana'a from bringing in arms for a fresh offensive against Marib city and nearby oil fields. Houthi media said on April 4 that resumption of **flights from Sana'a airport had been delayed** due to the volume of people trying to reserve seats.

Media supporting each side reported cease-fire violations in its first days, indicating the risk of the truce breaking down. These included a **Houthi attack** on a government position in northern Marib on April 2, the movement of weaponry inside **Marib** and **Hajjah** on April 3 and **violations in other governorates**, as well as the **seizure of an oil tanker** by the coalition off the coast of Jizan.



A coalition airstrike March 26, 2022, on the grounds of the General Authority for Insurance and Pensions in the Haddah neighborhood of Al-Sabeen district, Sana'a, killed a security guard and seven family members who lived in two homes that were hit. //Sana'a Center photo by Asem al-Posi

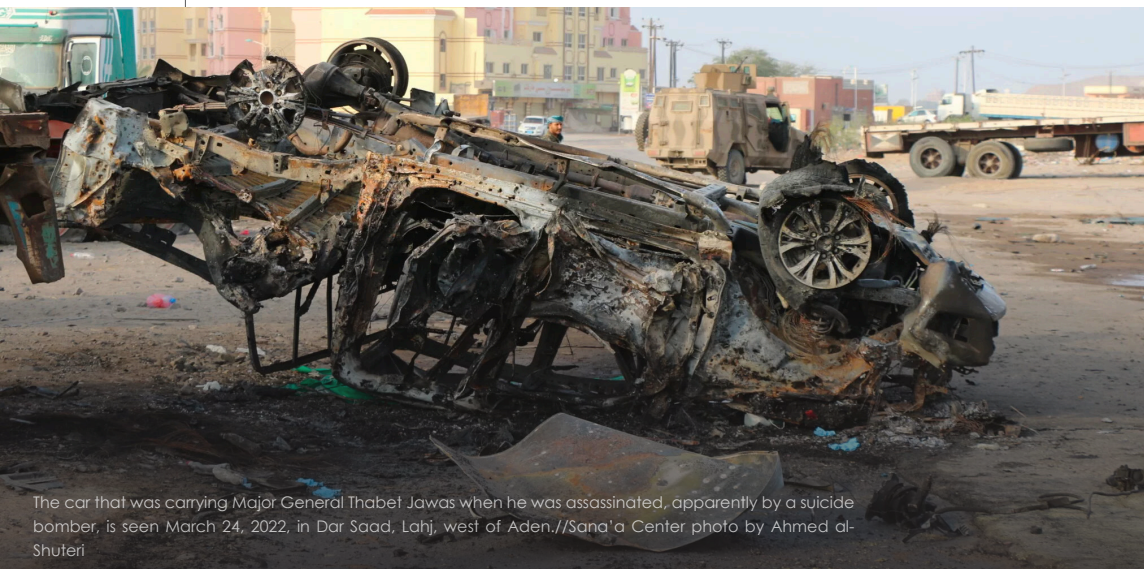
Coalition Airstrikes Focus on Hajjah

Fighting has slowed in Marib since the UAE-backed Giants Brigades pushed Houthi forces out of Shabwa governorate in January and the Houthis responded with drone and missile strikes on the UAE. In March, anti-Houthi forces continued fighting in a newly reactivated front near the Hajjah border town of Haradh, but their ground units, backed by coalition air strikes, were unable to make significant progress. A Houthi **missile strike on a coalition military camp** in the area reportedly killed nine Sudanese soldiers on March 2.

Coalition airstrikes appeared to dip during March. According to the [Yemen Data Project](#), there were 401 individual air raids in January and 200 in February, the highest levels since 2018, but 178 in March. A March 24 report released by [Save the Children](#) said there have been at least 376 airstrikes against educational facilities across the country throughout the war, a third of which took place in Taiz governorate.

Interior Minister Cancels Restructure of STC Forces

On March 14, the internationally recognized government's interior minister Ibrahim Haidan [overturned](#) a decision by STC-affiliated authorities in Aden to restructure security forces outside the control of the ministry. In a memorandum to chief of police Mutahar al-Shuaibi and governor Ahmed Lamlas, Haidan canceled an order from Al-Shuaibi to merge patrol and road security forces with the STC-affiliated Emergency Forces and Security Support. Tension between the government and STC authorities in Aden is characteristic of the failed efforts to implement the security and military annexes of the 2019 Riyadh Agreement (see: [Politics & Diplomacy](#)).



The car that was carrying Major General Thabet Jawas when he was assassinated, apparently by a suicide bomber, is seen March 24, 2022, in Dar Saad, Lahj, west of Aden.//Sana'a Center photo by Ahmed al-Shuteri

Army Commander Killed by Car Bomb

Major General Thabet Jawas, commander of the Al-Anad axis and the 131st Infantry Brigade in Lahj governorate, was [killed by a car bomb](#) as his convoy traveled through Aden governorate's northern district of Dar Saad on March 23. His son Nabil, a nephew and at least one other person died in the explosion, which was reportedly carried out by a [suicide bomber](#) as the convoy returned to Lahj from a funeral in Aden's Al-Tuwahi district.

Jawas, from Radfan district in Lahj, previously participated in a number of campaigns against the Houthi movement during the Sa'ada Wars, including the first in 2004 during which the founder of the Houthi movement, Hussein al-Houthi, was killed. He survived a similar attack last year. A prominent Houthi figure [celebrated his death](#) in what some media interpreted to be an implicit [claim of responsibility](#).

AQAP Attacks, Kidnappings Increase, IS-Yemen Pledges Loyalty to New Caliph

An uptick in Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) operations continued into March with an attempted assassination and the abductions of two humanitarians.

On March 15, three members of the STC-aligned Security Belt Forces were killed in an **explosion** targeting the convoy of the leader of the forces in Abyan, Brigadier General Abdullatif al-Sayed. Al-Sayed, who has been the target of numerous assassination attempts over the past decade, was wounded along with eight other Security Belt soldiers traveling in his convoy near the city of Jaar in Abyan's Khanfar district. The assassination attempt was later claimed by AQAP, which said it was carried out by **two suicide bombers**.

AQAP is also suspected of **abducting two foreign employees** of Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) from their car in eastern Hadramawt governorate on March 6 (see: **Humanitarian and Human Rights, 'MSF Suspends Work in Marib After Abductions'**). It was the third such incident in a month. AQAP militants kidnapped five UN employees in Abyan governorate on February 11; a March 9 report said AQAP was **demanding a US\$5 million ransom** and mediation via an unspecified Gulf country. The group also **kidnapped** a British UN employee in Lahj governorate on February 23.

AQAP affiliate Ansar al-Sharia also threatened to execute **local government officials in Hadramawt** for alleged corruption, according to a report on March 9. A **Norwegian national was arrested** in Sana'a on March 7 on suspicion of belonging to AQAP. The group **announced on March 17** the death of high-ranking commander Ammar al-Sanani in a US airstrike in Marib governorate.

After a long period of inactivity, the Islamic State's (IS) Yemen division published photos of fighters pledging allegiance to the Islamic State's new caliph on March 12, though it was not clear where the images were taken. IS branches have issued statements of support for Abu al-Hassan al-Hashemi al-Quraishi after he was **appointed on March 10**.

Other Military and Security Developments in Brief:

- **March 3:** Bani Nawf and Shulan tribesmen clashed with Houthi fighters on March 3 near Hazm city, Al-Jawf governorate, in a **dispute over access to hundreds of fuel trucks parked in a holding area**.
- **March 10:** Reuters **reported** that the United States and Saudi Arabia mounted a successful joint operation in January to rescue two American women held captive by Houthi authorities in Sana'a.
- **March 11:** The Yemeni government announced it had seized 54 **heat-seeking missiles** at the Shatin border crossing with Oman in Al-Mahra governorate. The missiles were reportedly hidden inside electricity generators, Iranian made and destined for the Houthis.
- **March 23:** **Yemeni freelance photojournalist** Fawaz al-Wafi was found dead in his car in Taiz, highlighting the ongoing threat to journalists. Al-Wafi, who was found with stab wounds to his chest and other parts of his body, lived in an area under Yemeni government control, but it was not clear who was behind the killing. In November 2021, a journalist was killed and her reporter husband wounded in a bomb attack on their car in Aden as they traveled to hospital for her to give birth.

- **March 23:** Saudi media said the coalition had **destroyed two explosive-laden boats** that the Houthis were planning to use in attacks on Red Sea oil tankers; they were apparently found **off the coast of Hodaydah**.
- **March 29:** Gunmen **shot dead** Karam al-Mashreqi, a commander in the STC's Security Belt forces. Al-Mashreqi had clashed last year with another STC commander for control of the Sheikh Othman district in Aden where the assassination took place.



UN special envoy Hans Grundberg meets March 22, 2022, with representatives of the Political Bureau of the National Resistance during a series of bilateral consultations with Yemeni political parties in Amman, Jordan. //OSESgy photo by Abdel Rahman Alzorgan

Politics and Diplomacy

Casey Coombs

Yemeni parties came together in Riyadh at the end of March in an effort to build unity, but in the month running up to the event the schisms among them were on full display in southern Yemen, where the Southern Transitional Council (STC) pushed back against political competitors in Aden and Shabwa.

On March 1, forces affiliated with the STC stormed the headquarters of the General People's Congress (GPC) party in Al-Tuwahi district in the interim capital of Aden, abducted its security guards and shuttered the building. The GPC issued a [statement](#) accusing the STC-aligned governor of Aden, Ahmed Lamalas, of ordering a "provocative criminal act that undermines the foundations and rules of democracy on which the peaceful political parties in the country were based."

Hours after the takeover of the building, forces wearing police uniforms removed a GPC sign on the outside of the building and [raised](#) an STC banner. An [STC-organized protest](#) in Sayoun on the same day demanded Yemeni army troops be removed from Hadramawt governorate. The rift played out later in the month as well, when the Interior Ministry overruled an STC order to restructure security forces outside the command and control of the ministry (see: [Military and Security, 'Interior Minister Cancels Restructure of STC Forces'](#)).

The storming of the GPC headquarters took place a day after the Political Bureau of the National Resistance Forces, led by Tariq Saleh, nephew of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, announced the opening of an office in Shabwa governorate. Following suit on March 14, the STC [inaugurated an office](#) in the capital, Ataq, having previously seen its political activities in the governorate severely curtailed under the pro-Islah former governor, Mohammed bin Adio.

On March 19, STC supporters in **Shabwa** demonstrated in the capital, Ataq, against the presence of northern Yemeni political parties in general and the National Resistance Forces' political office specifically. The director of the STC's Foreign Affairs Department, Mohammed al-Ghaishi, **said** in a later interview that the STC would support northern parties against the Houthis in northern governorates, but that they were not welcome in the south.

Both Saleh's National Resistance Forces and the STC are backed by the United Arab Emirates. The former, which has been based in the port city of Mokha in Taiz governorate since 2018, **announced** the establishment of a political arm on March 24, 2021, in the presence of several well-known individuals from the GPC. Tariq Saleh remains a popular figure among some segments of the former ruling party.

The STC appears increasingly threatened by the GPC's growing clout in the south. In the final days of December, President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi appointed Awadh bin al-Wazir al-Awlaqi, a Shabwani tribal leader and GPC member of parliament, as governor of Shabwa. He succeeded Bin Adio, who was sacked on December 25.

Gov't Says Prisoner Swap Deal With the Houthis Not Finalized

On March 27, the head of the Houthis' prisoner affairs committee, Abdul Qader al-Murtada, announced that a prisoner exchange deal had been reached with the internationally recognized government. Al-Murtada **said** on Twitter that the UN-supported agreement includes 1,400 Houthi prisoners in exchange for 823 prisoners, including 16 Saudis, three Sudanese nationals, the brother of Yemeni President Hadi and former Defense Minister Mahmoud al-Subaihi.

A few hours after Al-Murtada's announcement, his counterpart in the internationally recognized government, Hadi Haig, **said** in a Twitter post that a prisoner swap deal was still under discussion. "Upon final approval, the [UN] envoy's office will be notified in an official memorandum, which will be published," he said.

The Twitter exchange came two days before the start of a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-hosted summit for peace consultations in Riyadh.

GCC Hosts Consultations in Riyadh; 3 Activists Abducted en Route to Riyadh

On March 17, GCC Secretary General Nayef al-Hajraf announced that the Gulf bloc would host consultations among Yemeni parties between March 29 and April 7 in Riyadh to discuss a peace deal. Al-Hajraf said that 500 people from all Yemeni parties would be invited to participate in the consultations, no parties would be excluded and no agenda would be imposed on the participants. The **internationally recognized government** and the **STC** issued statements supporting the GCC consultations, while the Houthis **said** the peace talks were "not sincere" and declined to attend unless talks were held in a neutral

country. The membership of the GCC consists of six oil-rich monarchies: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.

On March 28, Houthi security forces in Ibb governorate **abducted** three civil rights activists on their way to the Yemeni peace consultations in Riyadh. The three men – Hammoud al-Awdi, a professor of sociology at Sana'a University, Anwar Shaab and Abdulrahman al-Olfi – were traveling to Aden airport when they were stopped at a Houthi checkpoint in Ibb and taken to the Political Security Organization prison in the governorate. The men had **reportedly** obtained approval from senior Houthi leaders in Sana'a to travel to Riyadh.

Yemeni army troops near the Um Reish military camp in Al-Jubah district, Marib governorate, on January 14, 2022 // Sana'a Center photo by Abdulmajeed Al-Khadimi

On March 5, senior Houthi official Mohammed Ali al-Houthi **announced** on Twitter that the group had signed a preliminary agreement with the UN to safely offload the 1.1 million barrels of oil aboard the aging FSO Safer oil tanker moored off the Houthi-controlled port of Hudaydah. A spill from the 45-year-old oil tanker could potentially cause an unprecedented environmental disaster in the Red Sea.

The **tentative agreement** states that the UN is to provide an alternative tanker vessel to offload the oil, while the Houthis will facilitate the process without any financial obligations.

The Houthis have repeatedly obstructed technical teams from taking steps to inspect, maintain and repair the Floating Storage and Offloading (FSO) terminal, owned by Yemen's national oil company, SAFER Exploration and Production Operation Company. In February 2021, UN officials called off a planned mission to do so because the Houthis would not provide written security guarantees.

Other Political and Diplomatic Developments in Brief:

- **March 7-24:** Yemeni political parties met with UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grunberg throughout March in Amman, Jordan, for talks focused on charting a path toward a sustainable political settlement to the conflict. Three weeks of consultations **wrapped up** on March 24, with plans to resume discussions in April. Grunberg met with representatives from the GPC, Islah, the Yemeni Socialist Party, the Nasserist Unionist People's Organization, the Inclusive Hadramawt Conference and the Political Bureau of the National Resistance forces, as well as other military and security professionals, politicians and civil society leaders.
- **March 12:** Houthi authorities began demolishing a Turkish monument near the headquarters of the Ministry of Defense in Sana'a city. The pyramid-shaped monument was built to memorialize Turkish soldiers who died in Yemen while serving in the armies of the Ottoman Empire. Former Turkish President Abdullah Gul inaugurated the monument during a visit to Sana'a in 2011. A similar monument had been built in Sana'a a century ago but was destroyed during the Imamate era.

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Economy & Finance

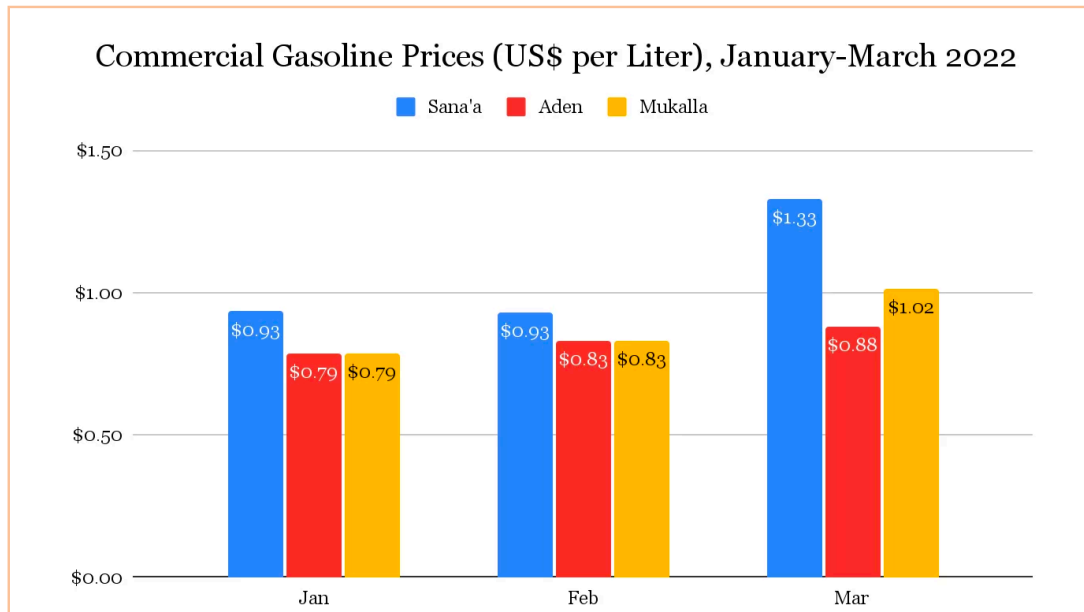
Sana'a Center Economic Unit

Gasoline and Cooking Gas Prices Continue to Spike

The fuel crises that erupted in both government- and Houthi-controlled areas in January continued throughout March. By mid-March, the authorities in Sana'a had increased the commercial price of gasoline by 43 percent to YR16,000 for a 20-liter tank, while the same quantity on the black market sold for YR26,000 (both priced in old rials, issued prior to 2017).

In areas under the nominal control of the internationally recognized government, the Yemen Petroleum Company's Aden branch raised the official price of gasoline 17 percent in March, from YR948 to YR1,110 per liter (YR22,200 for a 20-liter tank), while in Hadramawt, authorities raised gasoline prices almost 35 percent, from YR948 to YR1,278 per liter (YR25,560 for a 20-liter tank). These prices are in new rials, issued since 2017 by the government-controlled central bank in Aden (CBY-Aden). At the end of March, old rials were worth roughly twice the value of new rials, with US\$1 buying YR609 of the former and YR1,232 of the latter (see, 'Slight Depreciation of Old Yemeni Rials in Houthi-Held Areas').

Houthi authorities continued to blame the fuel crisis on the Saudi-led coalition which, at the Yemeni government's behest, has blocked fuel tankers from offloading at the Houthi-held port of Hudaydah. However, overall fuel imports to Yemen have remained fairly stable over the past year, with decreased shipments into Hudaydah being made up with increased imports through the government-controlled ports of Aden and Mukalla and in-country supply chains adapting to truck fuel to Houthi-held northern areas. Pro-government media reports from March suggest that Houthi forces have continued holding up trucks at land crossings, creating an artificial fuel shortage in northern markets. Houthi authorities have claimed that the fuel shipments regularly contain substandard fuel and need to be held for testing, though the government denies this and the Houthis have provided no credible evidence to support this assertion. Source: Sana'a Center Economic.



Source: Sana'a Center Economic Unit, Yemen Days,^[1] Al-Arabi News^[2]

The official price for a cylinder of cooking gas jumped twice in March in Houthi-held areas, **rising** from YR4,900 to YR5,900 at the beginning of the month, and then again to YR8,225 at month's end, amounting to a 68 percent cost increase. The availability of cooking gas at the official price was, however, limited. On the black market, where gas was more readily available, a cylinder was priced at YR20,000.

Houthi authorities **blamed** rising cooking gas prices on the increased cost of gas imports, with global natural gas prices having **increased substantially** since mid-December. The Houthi claims are dubious, however, given that prior to the ongoing conflict Yemen was a net exporter of natural gas, and throughout the war the government-run SAFER gas facility in Marib has continued to service most of Yemen's **cooking gas needs**, insulating domestic prices from fluctuations in global markets. The internationally recognized government **refuted** the Houthi claims, stating that gas from Marib was sold wholesale to the de facto authorities in Sana'a for YR1,750 (priced in **old rials**).

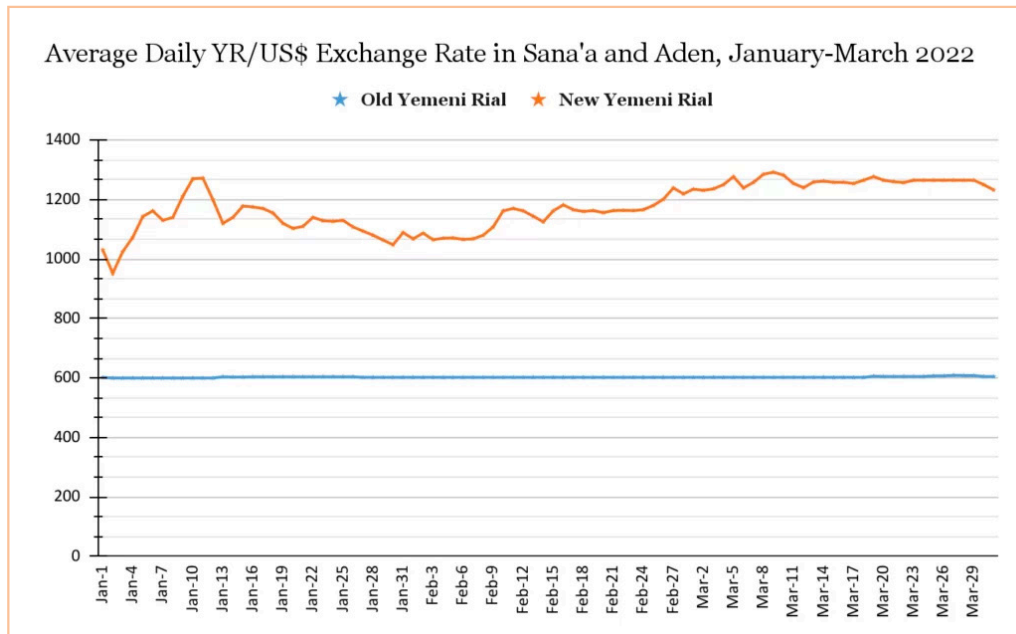
Slight Depreciation of Old Yemeni Rials in Houthi-Held Areas

In areas under Houthi control, old Yemeni rial banknotes slipped roughly 1.5 percent in value in March, trading as low as YR609 per US\$1 near month's end.

In government-controlled areas, new Yemeni rial bills (issued by the CBY-Aden since 2017) began March trading at YR1,235 per US\$1; they dipped in value by roughly 5 percent mid-month, but subsequently recovered to end the month trading at YR1,232. Source: Sana'a Center Economic Unit

[1] "Hadramawt ... The Yemeni Petroleum Company approves new gasoline prices ... the new prices [AR]," Yemen Days, March 16, 2022, <https://yemendays.com/posts/6044>

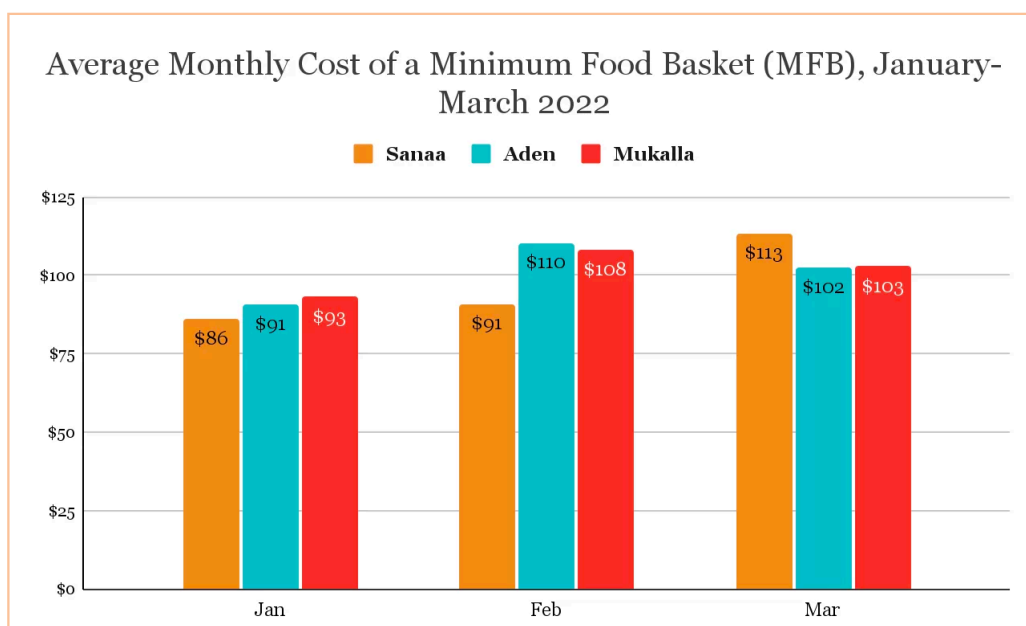
[2] "The oil company announces a new price for fuel from today [AR]," Al-Arabi News, March 16, 2022, <https://al-arabinews.com/news3999.html>



Source: Sana'a Center Economic Unit

Inflation Jumps, Spurred by Local Fuel Crisis and Global Food Prices

The recent surge in the global prices of food and fuel, accompanied by the local fuel crisis, has put upward pressure on the cost of most goods and services in Yemen. Fares for public buses in Houthi-held cities doubled in March, while private providers of electricity and water in Sana'a have increased their prices by 55 percent and 40 percent, respectively, since the start of the year. By the end of March, basic food staples also saw **price hikes**, particularly wheat flour, which had risen by 45 percent in Sana'a, 33 percent in Aden and 29 percent in Hadramawt. The cost of a **minimum food basket (MFB)** rose across the country: in Houthi-controlled areas, an MFB is now 33 percent more expensive; in Aden and Hadramawt, the cost increased 27 percent and 24 percent, respectively.



Source: Sana'a Center Economic Unit, Boqash^[3]

[3] "Find out the average prices of basic foodstuffs in Aden, Hadramawt and Sana'a for March [AR]," Al-Wattan, March 4, 2022, <https://www.alwatan.net/news/185790>

Other Economic Developments in Brief:

- **March 14:** The Council of the European Union officially adopted sanctions against the Houthi movement. The move comes following the UN Security Council's passage of Resolution 2624 on February 28, labeling the group a terrorist organization.
- **March 21:** The CBY-Aden issued Circular No.8, increasing the capital requirements of commercial and Islamic banks from YR6 billion to YR45 billion. The circular stipulated that the new requirements should be met within five years, with banks needing to increase their capital by 20 percent each year.
- **March 23:** A student union in northern Hadramawt governorate suspended studies at Sayoun University in protest over deteriorating economic conditions in the oil-rich governorate. In a statement issued by the General Union of Sayoun University Students, the group condemned "the high prices of oil derivatives, and the aggravation of students' suffering and their inability to reach colleges and continue the educational process." The walkout follows months of peaceful street protests across Hadramawt, in which residents have demanded accountability for the lack of basic services, including electricity, and hikes in the cost of diesel, cooking gas and food.
- **March 29:** The Unified Money Network (UMN) – a limited share company established by the CBY-Aden last autumn to oversee hawala remittance transfers and stabilize the Yemen rial – signed an agreement with Adroit Technologies to purchase and implement its money transfer system. The central bank said this was one of the final steps before the UMN becomes operational.



Humanitarian & Human Rights

UN Humanitarian Funding

The UN's main event to raise money for humanitarian aid to Yemen, the High-Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen, **raised** US\$1.3 billion on March 16, just 30 percent of the US\$4.3 billion UN funding appeal for the 2022 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). As of the end of March, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) was **reporting** that just US\$66.5 million in pledged funds had thus far been received. The High-Level Pledging Event, jointly hosted by the UN, Sweden and Switzerland, occurred a month after UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths **warned** millions face a "death sentence" if funding gaps were not addressed.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, whose active participation in the Yemen war has been a major contributor to the humanitarian crisis, were among the largest contributors of funding to previous Yemen HRPs. Neither country made any financial commitment to this year's UN relief effort. Meanwhile, the United States **tripled** its contribution from US\$191 million in 2021 to US\$584.6 million in 2022, and the European Commission doubled its contribution.

It is typical for UN appeals to fall short of targets; in both 2020 and 2021, the Yemen HRP received **less than 60 percent** of requested funds, a drop of **almost** one-third from 2019. Among the factors playing into this decline have been donor countries **redirecting budgets** to address domestic economic fallout related to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as **increasing** concerns that UN-led relief efforts in Yemen are not efficiently and effectively using the funds they are allocated. The UN had already announced major program cuts in Yemen, including one in January **reducing** by nearly half the food assistance received by 8 million people. The continued absence of funding for the Yemen HRP in 2022 to date is unprecedented, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine likely to **further draw donor**

attention away from Yemen, where two-thirds of the population requires humanitarian assistance. Aid funding is also a significant source of foreign currency in Yemen and with its decline further downward, pressure on the Yemeni rial and upward pressure on commodity prices can be expected.

MSF Suspends Work in Marib After Abductions

On March 13, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), also known as Doctors Without Borders, announced the suspension of some of its humanitarian activities in Marib governorate following the abduction of two of its foreign employees. The workers were kidnapped March 6 in the Khashaa area, near Marib's border with Hadramawt governorate. (See: 'AQAP Attacks and Kidnappings Increase, Daesh Appoints New Caliph') The organization will halt operations in five of its eight mobile clinics in the governorate and withdraw its support of Marib General Hospital.

On March 1, MSF withdrew its staff from Abs Hospital in Houthis-controlled Hajjah governorate, citing safety concerns, before resuming operations there on March 5. On February 11, five UN employees were abducted in Abyan governorate while returning to Aden after a field mission. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is suspected of carrying out the abductions.

Other Humanitarian and Human Rights Developments in Brief:

- American actress Angelina Jolie visited internally displaced and refugee communities in Aden, Lahj and Sana'a from March 6–8, in her capacity as a special envoy of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Jolie's three-day visit aimed to highlight Yemen's needs and mobilize support for humanitarian action.



Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman introduces Saudi Vision 2030 at an April 26, 2016, press conference. //SPA photo

Yemen and Saudi Part II: A Future of Neighborly Relations

Abdulghani Al-Iryani

For seven decades, leaders and pundits from Yemen and Saudi Arabia have capitalized on the differences and conflicting interests between the two nations to advocate adversarial, often antagonistic relations and policies. Incompatibilities pointed out between the two states typically include republic vs. monarchy, poor vs. rich, left-leaning vs. right-leaning, chaotic vs. stable, etc. So, while Yemen depended and continues to depend on remittances from its migrant workers in Saudi Arabia for its economic survival, and Saudi Arabia depended on cheap Yemeni labor for its initial construction boom through the 1970s and '80s, and for a large portion of the service sector until today, the trajectory of the relationship between the two states has been heading toward a clash.

A quick review of the differences cited above shows how baseless they are. The republic vs. monarchy argument does not stand up to scrutiny. During the last decade of Ali Abdullah Saleh's rule, he was as authoritarian as any of the region's monarchs, and his family, in-laws and close allies were a privileged aristocracy. Many leaders of the region's republics were far more despotic than any king or prince in the region. As for the global geopolitical game that was played during the cold war, it was already over by the day of unification. The Saudi fear of Yemeni democratization that was rational in the early years of the republic was discredited by the mid-1990s when Saleh amended the constitution to concentrate power in his hands, and effectively laid to rest with the 2003 parliamentary elections in which his party, using state resources and outright fraud, achieved a suffocating majority.

Counterintuitive as it may be, the authoritarianism that the Saudis usually favored was a major cause of the deteriorating relations between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Saleh viewed the official state relationship between Yemen and Saudi Arabia as a personal competition with the Saudi dynasty. He acted with grave disregard for the counsel of his advisers and the interests of millions of Yemenis who relied on remittances from Saudi Arabia. His frequent confrontations with the Saudis were often a means to extort them, ruining many attempts by the Saudi private sector to invest in Yemen. Saudi willingness to turn a new page after the signing of a border treaty in 2000 was foiled by Saleh's devious behavior toward Saudi Arabia, which included the smuggling of arms into Saudi territories and providing a safe haven for Saudi-designated terrorists.

However, Saleh was not the only culprit in the deteriorating relations between the two neighbors. Yemenis attributed the goodwill of the Saudis to the late King Abdullah. His half-brother Nayef, and Nayef's son Mohammed, who handled the Yemen file for a period, did not demonstrate goodwill. They never did. In 1994, after Saudi Arabia's dismal failure in effecting the cessation of the south, Prince Nayef argued that Prince Sultan's costly approach of maintaining, through the Special Committee for Yemen Affairs, a vast network of clients among the military, civilian and tribal leaderships in Yemen was not working. Nayef managed to wrest control of the Special Committee and its fat budget from his brother Sultan and immediately launched a campaign of assassinations and sabotage throughout Yemen. The hired assassin and member of Spain's Al-Qaida cell, Nabil Nanakli, who was arrested in Sana'a in 1996 and convicted for organizing a sabotage and assassination network, confessed that he received his instructions to assassinate the foreign minister of Yemen at the time, Abdel Karim al-Iryani, from Prince Mohammed bin Nayef himself. The Yemeni government sent the taped confessions of Nanakli to the UN security council. Yemen remained vexed by the Saudi policy of maintaining a vast network of Yemeni clients, many of them tribal sheikhs who defied state authority and undermined the project of state building. As a result, most Yemenis distrusted Saudi Arabia as much as Saudis distrusted Saleh. Distrust, misperceptions and bad decisions, more than anything else, led Yemen-Saudi relations to the dismal state they are in today.

For Yemen and Saudi Arabia to avoid the mistakes of the past, they need to move beyond lip service on a few rather obvious facts. For Yemenis, the first of these is that Yemen has little chance of exiting the vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment without establishing a strong relationship with its northern neighbor. Yemen is a poor country. Talk about developing its natural resources and tourism and suchlike is not an option if Yemen cannot be nursed back to stability and viability through an indispensable partner in development like Saudi Arabia. The second is that Yemen's sovereignty and territorial integrity are better defended with a posture that is non-threatening to its neighbors than via a military buildup that drains resources and subjects the Yemeni people to the twin existential threats of poverty and instability.

For Saudis, they need to acknowledge that living next to a time bomb is not an option. As the Houthi movement has demonstrated, Yemen can easily become a serious threat to Saudi Arabia. Yemen's impoverished and underdeveloped nature has been no barrier to this antagonistic ideological movement acquiring the technology to cause the kingdom a major

headache. In time, further technological advancements will make Saudi Arabia even more vulnerable to disaffected forces in an alienated Yemen. The climate of uncertainty created by the Ukraine invasion could also create unpredictable shifts in regional alliances. Yemen is quite literally a gaping hole in Saudi Arabia's strategic underbelly, open for adversaries to walk in at will. Talk in some Saudi quarters of exiting the conflict and leaving Yemenis to fight a long war of attrition will only keep that time bomb ticking. Seven years of war have amply demonstrated that the Houthis – the best-organized and best-led faction in Yemen – are perfectly capable of pulling out the pin.

A second obvious fact is that the Saudi tendency of encouraging one-man rule continues to prevail in decision-making circles today, despite the costs to Riyadh of dealing over 33 long years with Ali Abdullah Saleh, not to mention figures such as Saddam Hussein and Moammar Qaddafi. Saudi Arabia needs to ditch policies of submitting the fate of an entire nation to the whims of one man if there is to be hope of building a healthy relationship between the two countries. Democracy is an unwieldy and often messy form of government, but it offers the best chance for placing the welfare of the people above the personal aggrandizement of a ruler. Saudi decision-makers who persist in the notion of a strongman managing their Yemen problem for them out of Sana'a risk sacrificing the interests of both countries. Saudi Arabia needs to work harder on its Yemen relations to enjoy long-term stability and security along its southern borderlands.

The third obvious fact is that Yemen and Saudi Arabia have much in common and should be able to complement each other strategically and economically. The combined demographic weight of the two countries would be a deterrent to any regional power. And marrying Yemeni labor and the Yemen market with Saudi capital is only the first in a long list of economic synergies that are within reach but require a new approach in Riyadh. Saudis have seen Yemenis as either clients or enemies, never their counterparts. But Yemenis are a proud, if humble people and will never accept such a status. A new page in Yemen-Saudi relations must start on the basis of partnership between equals.

This article is part of a series of publications by the Sana'a Center examining the roles of state and non-state foreign actors in Yemen.

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A coalition airstrike March 26, 2022, on the grounds of the General Authority for Insurance and Pensions in the Haddah neighborhood of Al-Sabeen district, Sana'a, killed a security guard and seven family members who lived in two homes that were hit. (Sana'a Center photo by Asem al-Posi)

US Assistance to Saudi-Led Coalition Risks Complicity in War Crimes

Afrah Nasser

The protracted conflict in Yemen has killed almost **a quarter of a million people** directly or indirectly due to inadequate food, health care and infrastructure. It has included unlawful attack after unlawful attack, with homes, hospitals, schools and bridges among the **civilian objects that the warring parties have targeted**. Fighting has internally displaced more than **4 million** people from their homes. Food insecurity is on the rise.

The conflict that began in 2014 between the Houthi armed group and the government of President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi morphed in 2015 into a conflict between the Houthis and the US-backed coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Today the fighting includes **nearly 50 other battle fronts**.

The UN Security Council **panel of experts has reported** for several years that Iran continues to supply the Houthis with weapons. The US has **also supported** the Saudi- and UAE-led coalition politically, particularly by shielding the coalition from criticism and enabling the United Nations Security Council to focus its scrutiny only on the Houthis, as seen in **Resolution 2216**, drafted by the UK in 2015.

Since 2015, the **United States has supplied** Saudi Arabia and the UAE with billions of dollars worth of weapons, training and logistical support, including **aerial refueling until 2018**, as the coalition conducts its aerial bombing campaigns. **Human Rights Watch** has **documented** the coalition's use of US-manufactured weapons in **at least 21 apparently unlawful attacks** under the laws of war. These attacks include the March 15, 2016, **attack on a market in the village of Mastaba** in northwestern Yemen, which killed at least 97

civilians, and the attack on October 13, 2016, [on a funeral ceremony](#) in Yemen's capital, Sana'a, which killed at least 100 people and wounded more than 500, including children.

[Mounting evidence](#) shows that parties to the conflict, the coalition as well as the Houthi armed group, continue to commit serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. On January 21, coalition warplanes struck a detention center in Sa'ada governorate, northern Yemen, resulting in dozens of casualties. According to a local nongovernmental group, Mwatana for Human Rights, some detainees who survived the strikes were then [gunned down](#) by Houthi forces on the ground while they tried to flee.

The Houthi armed group also continues to [launch indiscriminate attacks](#) into populated areas, including into internally displaced people's camps in Yemen's Marib governorate. Despite the ongoing toll on civilians, the US continues to sell weapons and [provide training and logistical support](#) to the coalition.

One recent sale approved by the Biden administration happened in December, when Raytheon, a leading US defense company, sold \$650 million of [air-to-air missiles and associated equipment to Saudi Arabia](#). In response to a Human Rights Watch 2018 inquiry about the steps Raytheon takes to ensure protection of civilians, Raytheon's vice president, Timothy F. Schultz, wrote that "Raytheon sales of munitions to Saudi Arabia have been and remain in compliance with US law and do not violate US or international legal requirements applicable to the company."

Raytheon and other US companies operating in the weapons sector have responsibilities under the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#) and the UN [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) to assess the impacts of their operations, sales and services, based on international human rights requirements and the laws of war. While the United States government facilitates the company's weapons sales, the company says [it complies with US law](#) and policies. There are still serious concerns that Raytheon is not meeting its human rights responsibilities as its munitions continue to be used to commit violations of international humanitarian law.

Even though the US government is aware of credible allegations that US-made weapons are being used in violation of international humanitarian law, the US has possibly [violated its own obligations](#) by continuing arms sales to the coalition. Government officials could be [legally liable](#) for war crimes in Yemen, a consideration raised in a State Department Inspector General report [in 2020](#).

The US condemns likely war crimes committed in other armed conflicts, such as [those by Russia in Ukraine](#), but continues to support the coalition that is committing similar violations in Yemen. Yemeni civilians have also told Human Rights Watch that by supplying weapons used to target them, the US has contributed to antagonism, pain and resentment. Yemenis say that they are well aware that some of the bombs that fall on their homes and heads are made in the US, as weapon remnants found at strike sites by [journalists, researchers](#) and others have repeatedly shown.

The US continues to show an inadequate commitment to ensuring accountability for the possible crimes of its allies, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and for its own role. After seven years of ignoring rights groups' warnings of potential US complicity in serious crimes in Yemen, Washington needs to reverse course and take concrete steps to end its complicity, including by suspending weapon sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE until they curtail unlawful airstrikes. The US should also pursue credible investigations and prosecutions into previous alleged violations.

Afrah Nasser is the Yemen researcher at Human Rights Watch.



Russian missiles disable a TV tower in Kyiv on March 1, 2022. (Photo courtesy of Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ukraine via Wikimedia Commons)

Fleeing Another Conflict: An Inside Look at the #YemenisinUkraine Safety Network

Azal Al-Salafi

The Russian invasion of Ukraine sent waves of shock across the world. However, it did not take long in the Yemeni diaspora for the first shock to be replaced by another: the realization that some Yemenis were facing yet another war, this time in Europe.

About 600 Yemenis, many of them students, were residing in Ukraine when Russia invaded on February 24. Consequently, a collective of young activists and volunteers soon formed a safety network to address the plight of these Yemenis caught up in the war. It consists of members of Yomn Council, a newly established association led by Yemeni youth living abroad that aims to identify and support efforts to resolve Yemen-related issues, as well as other diaspora Yemenis and internationals with connections to Yemen. The initiative, #YemenisinUkraine, mobilized by the safety network on social media, called for action from authorities and the international community to provide a lifeline to Yemenis fleeing the war.

Activists' hopes of expanding coordination with the Yemeni embassy in Warsaw to help Yemenis out of Ukraine were soon dashed. According to the volunteers, the embassy lacked empathy and diplomatic courtesy when it rejected the network's request for assistance and guidance in ensuring the safety of 12 Yemeni students who network volunteers had learned were stranded for more than 24 hours at the Ukraine-Poland border. A network volunteer said the embassy in Warsaw advised that the students "go to the reception camps for refugees or submit their files to the security forces at the border."

"All we wanted from them (the embassy) was to help us send some water and transport, considering the small number of Yemenis versus other nationalities," said Reem Jarhum, a #YemenisinUkraine organizer. The volunteers were surprised when, a day later, the Yemeni ambassador to Poland [appeared on Al Jazeera](#) and other social media platforms claiming to have helped Yemenis stranded at the border. The report included images of some Yemenis who had managed to cross the border, though not the 12 students, who were being joined by others as the hours passed. Some Yemen embassies in Ukraine's neighboring countries, under pressure from their communities, issued a [statement](#) with guidelines for fleeing Ukraine and offered to assist with passport issues.

Activists and human rights organizations have [denounced](#) what they perceive as a double standard in the treatment of non-Ukrainian versus Ukrainian refugees, evident not only in [media coverage](#) of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, but also in the implementation of legal [procedures](#). [Videos, images, and voice messages](#) documenting mistreatment have put a spotlight on the plight of non-Ukrainians, sparking a global movement under the hashtags #AfricansinUkraine, #SudaneseinUkraine, #SyriansinUkraine, #IndiansinUkraine and #YemenisinUkraine.

#YemenisinUkraine Volunteers Take up Civil Duties

According to #YemenisinUkraine activists and volunteers, more than 250 Yemenis were in danger of losing their lives during the Russian invasion, struggling to flee some of the most high-risk areas. Yemeni students were stuck at the border for days, and reported that the situation was "extremely chaotic and inhumane." One student said that during four days at the border, there was no food, no water, not even a toilet, and that police and security guards used dogs and fired shots at them to control the queues. Others told volunteers that they were forced to walk long distances between border crossings and wait many hours in line to have their identities and passports checked. "We had to walk 20 to 30 kilometers, then we arrived at different stops that were extremely crowded with all different nationalities, except Ukrainians, and had to wait for more than 17 hours each time due to the long queues at the borders," one said.

A 24-year-old Yemeni student said: "We were shocked at the level of abuse, discrimination and injustice as we watched Ukrainians and their animals being prioritized and pass us by in comfortable buses with food and drink while we endured in the cold without food, drink or sleep."

Another Yemeni student, 20, told #YemenisinUkraine volunteers that in late February, two days after the war erupted, drivers began charging up to US\$500 per person for rides from Kharkiv, near Ukraine's eastern border with Russia, to Lviv, 885 kilometers to the west, near the Polish border. "The situation was dire and reached an extreme level of exploitation," he recounted. Others who had crossed into Poland reported that available transportation prioritized Ukrainian women and children as well as other Europeans over other nationalities, regardless of age or gender. Some Yemeni students waited more than 20 hours for transport to Poland after walking 40 kilometers. Students who crossed the border told volunteers that they suffered from exhaustion after their long journey and more than four sleepless days, to the extent that some fainted and others required medical care for swollen legs.

By March 1, five days after Russia's invasion, volunteers had managed to locate 131 Yemeni students in Ukraine and had assisted 89 of them (68 percent) in crossing into Poland, Hungary and other countries. The volunteers continued to support the students afterward, providing safe shelter and meeting basic needs with their own funds, until a [crowdfunding campaign](#) was launched.

The Realities of Migration

#YemenisinUkraine volunteers provided holistic intervention and filled gaps that many aid organizations had neglected. They researched the legalities surrounding Yemeni asylum cases in Europe and brought in experts to answer questions on how to proceed so Yemenis could make informed decisions on their next steps and be aware of the consequences of their decisions. Despite immense efforts made by these volunteers in such a short period of time with limited resources, more difficult issues remain relating to the protection and asylum of Yemenis who escaped.

Migration is a process of cultural exchange, and it is important to understand its political, socio-economic and emotional impact. Studies that attempt to explain why large numbers of migrants are unhappy point to difficulties related to [discrimination](#) and [isolation](#). Immigrants and refugees also often experience [discrepancies](#) between the expectations and the realities of migration. Too often migrants and refugees are treated as a burden, rather than being recognized for their potential. Such attitudes and policies make the work of organizations and networks like #YemenisinUkraine not just important, but vital.

As of March 25, #YemenisinUkraine volunteers had located and assisted 170 Yemenis, most of them students at the borders to EU countries. Among these, 151, were in Warsaw, provided with safe and temporary housing from [#YemenisinUkraine](#) donations; others had continued on to Germany, the Netherlands and elsewhere. The number of Yemenis who may be still in Ukraine remains unclear. What is clear, however, is that Yemenis once again have lost their studies, jobs and communities. These numbers from Ukraine represent a fraction of Yemenis around the world who endure similar, whether from wars or discriminatory policies and systems. They are burdened by fears of violations, starting over and either making a home in another foreign country or returning to one of the war-torn countries they have fled in the past. Yemeni youth activists and safety networks, such as #YemenisinUkraine, strive to ease these fears and uncertainties on their journeys to finding security, dignity and home.

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